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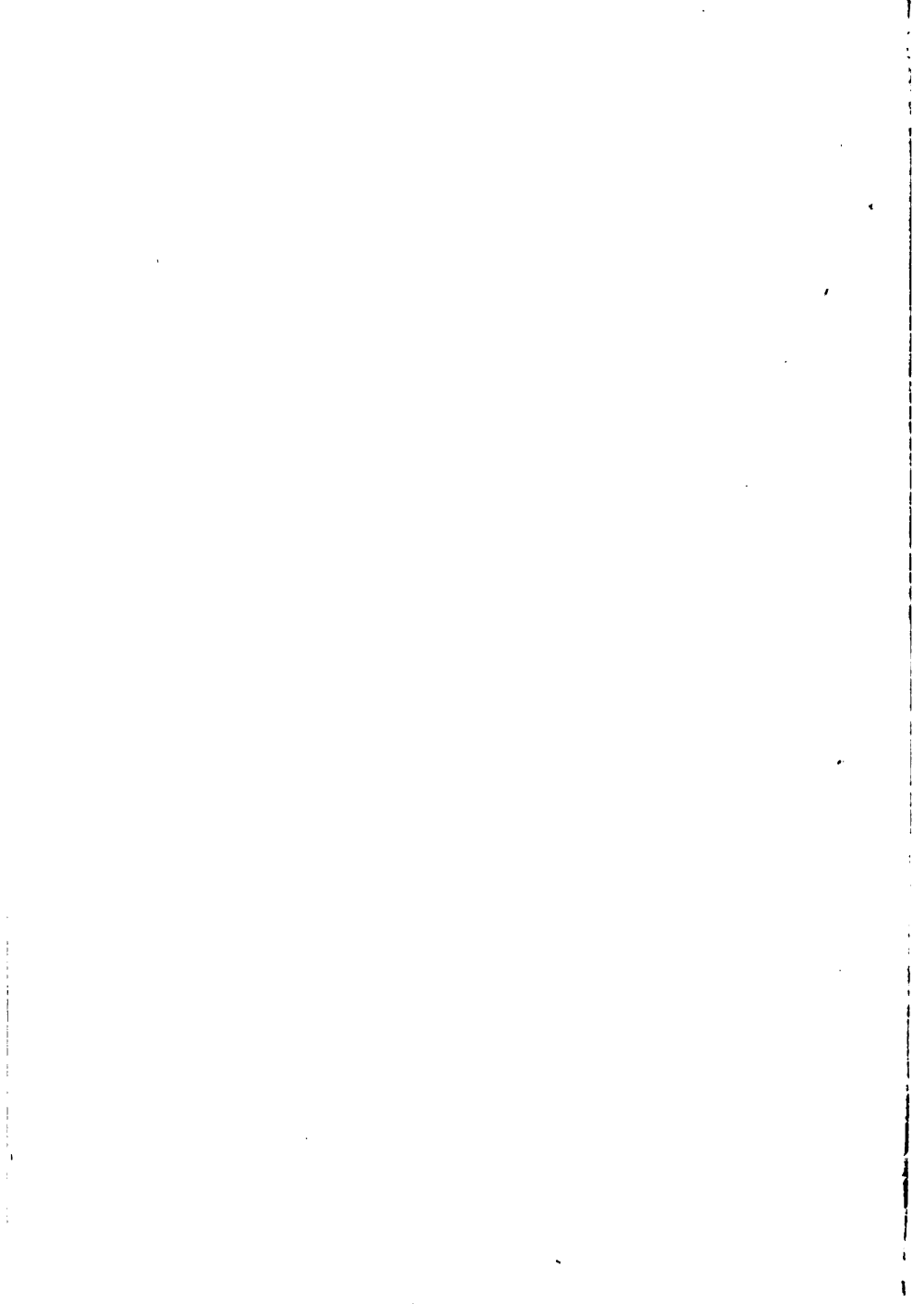
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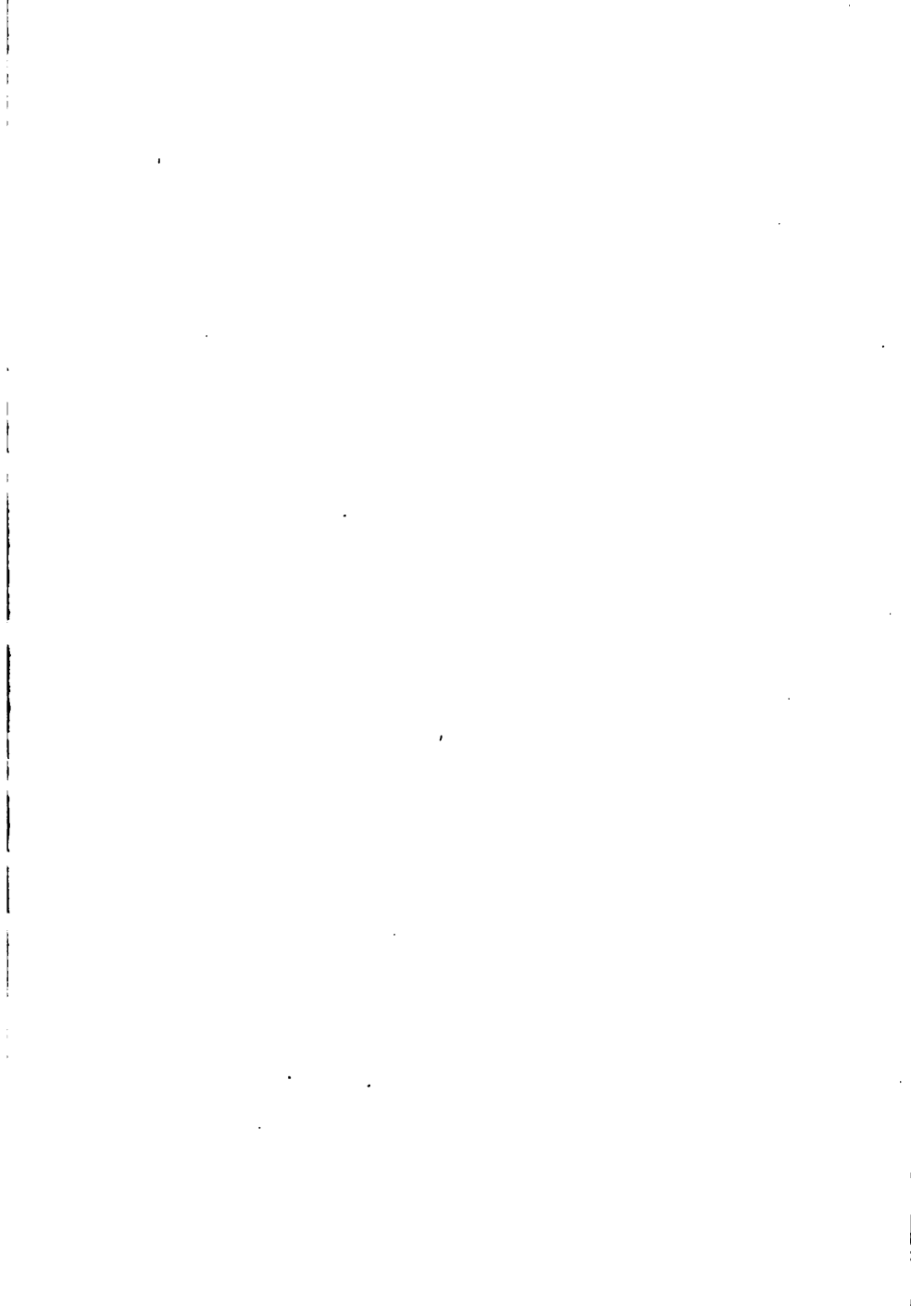
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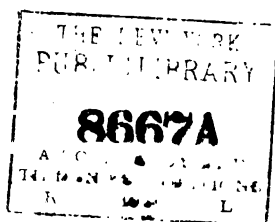
BY
HUBERT WALES

Author of "Cynthia in the Wilderness," "The
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HILARY THORNTON

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JUN 10 1909
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HILARY THORNTON

PART I

CHAPTER I

AMID the picturesque country of the southern Yorkshire wolds — ten miles west of Hull and six miles north of the Humber — lies the little village of West Drewton. It is called a village from long custom and by the will of its few inhabitants, but its claims to that title are not incontestable, consisting, all told, of a railway-station, some scattered cottages, one high-road, one muddy lane, and two houses of considerable pretensions. Though so near a humming commercial centre it has remained in still seclusion; summer and winter a lonely peace broods over it.

Local consequence is severely adjudged by the tale of bricks composing a man's abode. It follows, therefore, that, of the two houses to which reference has been made, the occupants of the Hall received a fractionally deeper deference from the village folk, a fractionally nicer courtesy from the neighbouring families, than those of the Manor. For the Hall was a house of noble plan, square to

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the winds, standing at the top of the hill. It was reached through lodge-gates along an imposing sweep of rolled gravel drive, scrupulously weedless; and when the head of the family was at home a flag fluttered from a staff on the topmost turret.

That position had been filled for many years by a man of amiable qualities, Colonel Swete-Evans, who talked impressively about the call of his parliamentary duties, and suggested easy conversance with matters and men of national significance. He had, indeed, at the instigation of his wife, sought and secured a seat in the constitutional assembly, and thenceforward had become a nonentity and a voting-machine in the House, and a halting speaker and important personage in his constituency. The esteemed gentleman had now, however, passed from history, and by a will corresponding in simplicity with his life, he had left at the disposal of his widow his rent-roll of four thousand pounds and the three benefices in his gift, with remainder to his only child. The former, the present potentate of the Hall, was a woman of ample fabric who found no difficulty in adapting herself fittingly to the position of local magnate.

The Manor had inferior claims to consideration. It was less spacious in structure and less commanding in situation. Long and low, surrounded by a leafy, homely garden, it stood in the valley and looked across the railway at the hills rising to the

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horizon. And it was approached by the muddy lane. No doubt it had looked at the same hills long before the stone of the Hall had been quarried. No doubt, too, in spite of the local appraisalment, the name of its present tenant would be remembered in Europe when that of Mrs. Swete-Evans had been forgotten in West Drewton.

Mrs. Randolph Wynne — the “Deloraine” of her first novels — the “Rainey Wynne” of her intimate friends — was not only a novelist and playwright and essayist of unusual appeal, she was a leader and strenuous worker in movements which made for the improvement of social conditions and the widening of the field of feminine effort and opportunity, and she was a cultured, graceful woman whose vivid personality had made itself felt in two continents. In London she was “Mrs. Randolph Wynne” in quick undertones across turned shoulders; in West Drewton she was “Mrs. Wynne o’ the Manor,” with just such inflection in the voice of the farm labourer who might supply the information as would show that he appreciated that she was tenant and not owner. It was that obscurity, and the stillness and seeming remoteness of the Yorkshire village, which attracted her. She came here to escape from the glare and to write her books; her summer occupancy of the Manor being punctuated, at intervals whose irregularity was somewhat of a scandal in the neighbourhood, by

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fleeting visits of Mr. Randolph Wynne, a sumptuous being of fashionable tastes and restless habit, who preferred London and Carlsbad.

On the afternoon of April 15, in a year which need not be specified, the flag on the tower of the Hall notified the surrounding country within a radius of three miles, as it had done for the last eight months (except on hopelessly wet days), that Mrs. Swete-Evans was in residence. Even in the wide circle it commanded there were few to notice it. Copse and pasture and furze rested untroubled by man in the spring sunshine. Only on the limit of the view, a white trail of smoke, approaching slowly, gave evidence of the active world.

The afternoon train from Hull was late. That was a feature of the afternoon train from Hull to which West Drewton was accustomed. The station-master did not emerge from his office to welcome it until twenty minutes after it was due, and, even so, he had time to exchange ideas with his porter upon the subject of the recent action of the Football Association, before it fumed and squeaked to a halt at the platform. A portentous shouting and hand-signalling and hastening to and fro of the limited staff, reinforced by the guard, ensued; and then the train steamed out again.

Only one passenger had alighted — a girl in a well-fitting travelling dress, carrying a bag; somewhat tired and dishevelled, it appeared, after a journey. Evidently she was not expected by the rail-

way officials. At sight of her both stopped abruptly, in the course of thoughtful return progresses to their several duties, and stared at her. In his surprise, the station-master even forgot that he usually relegated the journeyman business of collecting tickets to his subordinate, and accepted himself the piece of pasteboard which she tendered. He was patently somewhat flustered.

"Have you any other luggage, miss — ma'am?"

"No, I've only this," said the girl.

"Shall I send it up to the Hall, miss — ma'am?"

"No; I can take it, thank you."

There was a vagueness, even wildness, in her aspect. One would have said that she had been terrified, and was still suffering from the shock. One might, indeed, have gone a step farther and have conjectured that she had entered the zone of the perilous philosophy that nothing matters.

"I don't think there's anything —" The station-master looked through the door into the empty station-yard.

"I know."

She went out quickly and walked at a rapid pace up the white highroad, straining slightly at the weight of her bag.

The station staff watched her perplexed.

"That's a rum un!" said the porter at length.

"It's a most extraordinary thing," said the station-master, punctiliously paraphrasing his subordinate's crudity.

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"Seemed to me," was the porter's next remark, "she didn't 'ardly know what she was doing."

"There must have been a hitch," opined the station-master slowly, laying stress on the aspirate. Then he turned reflectively into his office.

Well might they wonder. For the woman who was now speeding up the road with her bag had left this same station twenty-four hours before, amid the fervent God-speeds of assembled friends, amid flowers and confetti, amid light laughter, on her wedding trip.

CHAPTER II

BOLTON STREET, Hull, is a clean side-street, composed of two rows of small houses with twenty-foot gardens in front. Such a street is not unique in the outlying district of a commercial city. Across one end runs the main thoroughfare of the Anlaby Road; across the other end runs a blank wall. The Anlaby Road is a spacious boulevard, where prosperous shops are interspersed with prosperous houses, and along whose middle-way the electric cars, which in the opinion of the inhabitants give it so conspicuous a pull over Piccadilly, clang and roll from morning till night.

No. 89, Bolton Street is not dissimilar from its neighbours, even in the fact that it is let out in suites of apartments. Here, in the front ground-floor sitting-room, one evening about six months after the incident which had aroused the concern of the railway staff at West Drewton Station, sat Mr. Hilary Thornton, managing clerk to Messrs. Cubitt and Wells — abbreviated to "Cubitt's" in colloquial use — the leading firm of solicitors in Hull. A halfpenny evening paper lay beside his chair, his feet were on one of the side columns of the chimney-piece, and a pipe was in his mouth.

He had sat in the same room in the same attitude

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many hundreds of nights before. For Thornton was not a man whose social engagements were apt to make heavy exactions on his time. He had all the will to be sociable, but his nature precluded easy friendships. He was felt to be a well-meaning and pleasant being, but one of somewhat neutral tint. He never asserted himself, and his efforts to enter into the habits of life of the men with whom he came in contact, to respond to their quips and pranks and spontaneous vivacity, were always a trifle manufactured and unready. If the chance of a moment left him talking alone to a circle of listeners, he became self-conscious, lost his thread, and ended weakly. In the smoke-room or in the street or in a railway-carriage "Thornton" was amiably regarded as largely a negligible quantity.

Indeed, his companions felt instinctively that he was not one of them. He was too unassuming — and he had insufficiently sounded his own nature — to consider that he was misplaced in the environment of a provincial town; nevertheless, there were latent forces and fires within him, which he was dimly aware of, but which he did not take the trouble to analyze or apply. Vaguely and almost unconsciously he was in sympathy with most of the conclusions of advanced thought. He had a glimmering view, through a sort of haze of constitutional necessity and economic complexity, of the essential immorality of the contrasted conditions in which half the world lived: the extremes in the

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social scale — the luxury and the squalor. Yet he consistently registered his lodger vote in the Conservative interest. Vagrant and somewhat uneasy cogitations turned his religious thoughts vividly towards agnosticism. Yet he recited nightly the set forms of prayer prescribed him in his infancy. He had a heavy suspicion that untold misery could be traced to the crushing of an eternal and powerful law, infinitely varied in its manifestation, into one inflexible channel. Yet he stood before the world as an unquestioning supporter of the institution of marriage.

The daily routine, the hourly association with the harassing immediate things of the insistent surface, kept his mind half closed against these problems of life and death. He looked at them, as it were, from afar, impressed almost to fear by their significance and immensity, and then withdrew to his County Court summonses and his processes and his applications for payment.

If fate had not bound him to an office desk, he might have developed into an artist or a reformer. On the other hand, he might have degenerated into a visionary and a lounge. For, though he could force himself through long periods of grinding collar-work, he was always consciously contending against a constitutional strain of apathy. He never did any work to which he had not to whip himself. His mental energy, though at times feverishly active, was not sustained; and there was about him

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a lack of aggressiveness, a lack of the vigorous self-assertion and self-confidence which might have been necessary to carry him into great issues.

But fate had not ordered it that Hilary Thornton should have power to choose between a life of useless dreams and one of earnest participation in the intellectual movements of a world ceaselessly progressing. It had tied him to a desk. He had been born with no special aptitude for legal work and no special sympathy for a lawyer's calling; but his father, with a large family to support and restricted means, had encountered an opportunity to obtain articles for one of his sons at a lenient fee at the time when Hilary was approaching his eighteenth birthday, and so to him it had fallen to become the lawyer of the family.

He had not exerted himself greatly during the five years of his tutelage. It was his nature to take life easily, while at the same time vaguely afraid of life and its looming responsibilities and its insistent necessities and its lurking terrors. But life had turned round and dealt him a blow. He had lost a berth, which he obtained shortly after his admission to the roll of solicitors, through lack of experience — the experience he had had every opportunity of gaining during his apprenticeship. He had never admitted to anyone how near he had come to literal starvation in the months which elapsed between that event and the securing of his present employment, for how many days he had sustained

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life on cups of coffee and a few buns, with how desperately a driven mind he had weighed the two alternatives of the river and an adult and humiliating subsistence upon his father's pressed resources.

Presently he bent forward and knocked out his pipe. Then, after a lazy stretch, he got up sharply and filled it again. The two actions were characteristic and illustrative. His life was a perpetual alternation between periods of disquiet concession to his inherent lassitude, and compensatory rushes of red-hot activity. It could be fairly symbolized by the old distressing tale in the arithmetic books about a man climbing a greasy pole, who slipped down two feet for every three he ascended, the problem being to discover how long it would take him to reach the top of the pole. Hilary had still far to climb, but his feet were off the ground, and by his own peculiar methods he was advancing.

In appearance he was slight but not spare, clean-shaven, fair, and of medium height, approaching thirty years of age, but looking younger. There was nothing uncommon about his features — you might meet many cast in a similar mould in any walk in any populous thoroughfare — but, for all that, his face was one which no intelligent observer would be likely to forget. It contained some subtle quality of distinction, an underlying earnestness, a subconscious appeal — it was difficult to say what — which stuck upon the mind; a reflection, possibly, of the forces of unexpressed

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and uncrystallized thought and the restless fires which were moving within him. He dressed well and carried himself erect, and he was a man of gentle culture and perceptions to the marrow of his bones.

The room which he occupied was furnished comfortably, but without taste. Indeed, with the exception of the addition of two or three framed photographs and a few books, it retained the appearance it had worn when he first entered it three years before. An excusable inference would have been that he possessed no soul for art; but the explanation was more subtle than that. His landlady's oleographs, the lustres and glassware on her mantelpiece, the flowery wall-paper and fancy-worked antimacassars, offended his æsthetic sense, but not so grossly that it gave him actual pain to live with them; and partly from indolence, partly from a good-natured disinclination to wound her feelings, he had never replaced them with more soothing objects of his own choice. Time and again he had felt the keenest desire to put the only home he had into a setting which would satisfy his eye and give him pleasure; time and again he had thought of his landlady's face; and time and again, he had let the moment pass.

When he had lighted his pipe, he took several quick turns up and down the room, whirled in the train of a stray thought. Then he dropped again, suddenly, into the easy-chair, picked up the even-

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ing paper and resumed his old position. He ran his eye aimlessly over the advertisements. The thought had passed, and he was once more lethargic.

He heard a latch-key turned in the hall-door without moving; he heard a man's footsteps in the passage, and kept his own feet on the upright of the chimneypiece. But he was quite conscious of the steps; indeed, he was listening to them, and hoping they would pass. He knew they were the steps of the man who occupied the rooms above him. They hesitated at his door — stopped. Then there was a short knock, and the door opened.

CHAPTER III

HILARY dropped his feet and pulled himself up in his chair rather hurriedly.

"Oh, come in Carbis," he said heartily. "I'm thankful to see you. I was getting tired of my own society."

He was not hypocritical. He had not wanted his neighbour, but now that the latter was actually present, he felt genuinely that his society was welcome.

A tall young cleric stood within the room. He carried a handsome silver-clasped case in one hand and a soft broad-brimmed hat in the other. The former he placed on a chair by the door, and threw the hat on a sofa. Then he walked up to the fire.

"You look cosy, as usual," he said.

His manner was repressed, even cold, his figure erect, his eyes grave and steady. A small cross was suspended from the centre of his watch-chain. Both in his earnestness and in his subdued manner the quality of culture seemed quietly insisted upon. If he had been made the subject of a *Vanity Fair* cartoon, he would have been labelled "Oxford Theology."

"Is that your general impression of me?" said

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Hilary. "I feel rather ashamed when I see that case."

"You needn't. 'In the midst of life —'" He did not finish the quotation.

"Yes. . . . But won't you have something? Have some whisky. And sit down."

"Thank you," said Carbis.

He filled a glass abstemiously, took a pipe from his pocket and lighted it, and dropped into a chair opposite Hilary. For a time neither of them spoke. Carbis never made conversation, and Hilary had run off on a train of his thoughts. Usually he limited the course of such mental peregrinations rigidly to his own consciousness, returning to the commonplace, when he adventured upon speech. To-day, for no reason that he could have explained, he allowed his reflections to flow into vocal expression.

"Yes, I suppose you are right," he said. "While I stay here and do what I'm told and follow the routine and live as a bachelor, I'm cosy."

Carbis smiled — one of his quiet, rather inscrutable smiles, which conveyed, not deliberately, but through the conceit of culture, a faint suggestion of indulgence. "You speak as if you resented it," he said.

"Well, it doesn't represent a very high life-product, does it — the achievement of cosiness — even if you didn't know you were damping down about three-quarters of your nature?"

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The other looked across at him with friendly interest, his finely shaped hands moving in a loose dovetail as he leaned back in his chair.

"What are you damping down?" he asked, after an appreciable pause.

"Oh, nothing that I can precisely define."

"Nothing that you will." Again there was the smile.

Hilary laughed, on his side — a little artificially. He himself had given the conversation a personal turn, and in his heart he was not sorry to have a chance of talking of his affairs to an understanding and trustable ear; but now that the opportunity confronted him in immediate view he felt slightly self-conscious. That feeling was entirely subjective, and was not induced by his particular interrogator. Though the young priest had only occupied the rooms above him for a few months, and though his own religious views were in that state of flux when the dogmatism of the clergy is apt to strike as least tolerable and least reasonable, he had grown to respect him and to like him. He knew that he was sincere, and he knew that he was strong. He taught what he believed, and he declined to teach what he did not believe, and for the latter cause had suffered a snub from his bishop that might stand in the way of his advancement.

"Well, I mean," said Hilary, "that office work at a stationary salary of a hundred and fifty a year

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and furnished rooms in perpetuity close the vista on a good many sides."

"Do you mean you can never improve from that?"

"Never."

"I thought positions such as yours usually led to partnership."

"Not in one case in a hundred; and certainly there is no likelihood of an opening in Cubitt's. The junior partner is a young man with a young family, and Cubitt himself has two sons already articled to the firm. Even if I had capital to put into the business, I should have no chance of being taken in."

"But you are not obliged to stay there."

"No, but if I went farther I should almost certainly fare worse. As a managing-clerkship, my berth here is a very good one. We are well staffed, and the name of the firm carries a prestige which is useful and pleasant to work with. When you are dealing with recalcitrants, there is no need for undignified insistence on your own weight and authority: the game is often half won when you state whom you represent. There is no firm of higher standing in Hull or the provinces than Cubitt's. But even if the appointment were a moderate one, I should think a good many times before I gave it up to seek another. I know what it means to be one of the unemployed."

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He got up to relight his pipe, carrying out the process somewhat hastily and with obvious pre-occupation.

"Oh, no," he concluded, resuming his seat, "a hundred and fifty a year and furnished rooms — that is my alpha and omega. I can see no possible means of anything different, and out of the salary I must save enough to buy an annuity for an old-age pension."

"For all that," said Carbis, in his level voice, "if you look at yourself in relation to many others, you will see several items on the opposite side of the account. You admit you are comfortable."

"But it doesn't leave much room for expansion, does it? I'm bounded by a rigid, permanent wall of writ and parchment. I must have no ambition or personal desires. If I try to mix myself up with intellectual life, I cease to be a practical man, and am not wanted at the office. If I marry, squalor and misery follow automatically."

"That is probably true," agreed Carbis; "improvident marriages are responsible for very much unhappiness."

"Yes," said Hilary, "but Providence doesn't wait till you have a thousand a year to make you a human being."

He spoke with some of the latent fire that smouldered within him, which came out in vivid bursts in his self-communings, but which was rarely shown

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— or if shown, only in screened flashes — in his intercourse with others.

“It is possible to overcome those tendencies with a little effort,” said Carbis.

“Yes, but why should we? Why should I be denied my inherent right of marriage?”

“You are not denied it; but, in your own interests and for your own comfort, you are wise enough to refrain from it.”

“That comes to much the same thing. As the world is fixed to-day, only the rich can obey the claims of their humanity — only the rich and those who are poor enough to be reckless.”

He finished breathlessly, chagrined and somewhat ashamed by his constant inability to say pregnant things naturally — slightly startled, too, by the frankness and fervour of his own utterance. He had got so far in thought before, but never in speech.

“That is taking you into deep waters,” said Carbis, unemotionally. “It is rather futile to criticize a condition of things which the accumulated experience of centuries has shown to be best fitted to the human race. And, in saying that, one only views the matter from the lesser and rationalist side.”

“I don’t know that I was actually having a tilt at the institution of marriage,” said Hilary. “I’m not sure. However, I dare say you are right. Have some of my tobacco?”

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He yielded lightly, as it was his habit to yield, in appearance, for the sake of harmony. Anything in the shape of a stringent argument on vital questions was repugnant to him. Carbis had closed his mouth, but he had not touched his mind. Besides, the big things which sometimes troubled him invariably seemed out of place when the moment came to utter them. He felt, especially in the face of Carbis's cold positivism, his incapacity to express his inchoate thoughts, on the spur of a moment, with sufficient force and lucidity to bring conviction, or even comprehension, to his hearer. It really did not matter what he said or what he thought.

"And you are exaggerating about the recklessness of the poor," said Carbis, who would never let a statement pass with his apparent assent if it had not actually gained it. "There are people in the slums who have lost all their finer instincts through poverty and become utterly careless, and who live very squalidly. But one can usually see the lack of grit in them, an inborn flaccidity which prevents them catching hold, and which would probably have brought them down, wherever they had been placed. The better class working-man keeps a clean home together and lives decently and comfortably. His chief trouble and his chief danger is the monotony of his life, the routine you have been complaining about."

"Yes, I realize that," said Hilary, who was now anxious to get away from the whole subject to one

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less constraining and exacting. "Perhaps I put it too strongly, or, rather, you interpreted me too literally. What I meant was that the only sections of the community who can marry under existing conditions are those who are what is called 'well to do' and the labouring class who have no appearance to keep up."

"That's a commonplace, of course," replied Carbis; "but it may not be so much of a hardship as you imagine."

He lapsed into silence, his fingers upon the bowl of his pipe, his eyes looking in upon himself with quiet concentration; and for a time Hilary did not interrupt him. He was anxious to get upon a new topic, however; and when a few minutes had passed, he made a commonplace remark.

Carbis did not reply to it.

"I was going to tell you something," he said, "which I think may make you feel less discontented with your lot."

"Yes?" said Hilary, with a show of interest.

"I only do so," prefaced the other, "to help you to see your own case relatively. It doesn't concern others."

"Yes, I understand," said Hilary. He was becoming curious.

"Well, you have been telling me about the restrictions and limitations of your life, and I agree with you that it involves considerable hardships, and means, as you say, a good deal of damping

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down. At the same time, your position is enormously superior to many — among others to my own."

"Yours!" said Hilary. "I should have said just the reverse. You are sincere in your work, and it interests you; you have the hope of promotion, of position — a rectory, or even a bishopric — and eventually marriage."

"I have not the last hope," replied Carbis calmly; "and possibly, for that reason, not the others, either."

"You mean you have taken a vow of celibacy. But that's your own doing. It doesn't entitle you to parade your hard case."

"I am not parading my hard case," said Carbis, "and I have taken no vow of celibacy."

"Why can you never marry, then?"

"Because I am married already."

Hilary took his pipe from his mouth. "Good gracious!" he exclaimed.

Dramatic explanations started to his mind. He remembered the plot of "Jane Eyre." Such tragedies were not uncommon he knew. Then he looked at the young curate sitting opposite him, restrained, almost austere, but courteous, kindly, good. It seemed too terrible a supposition. Another thought occurred to him.

"Are you juggling with words? Do you mean a sort of union of souls?"

"Oh dear, no!"

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"But I have never known you as anything but a bachelor. If you are married, where is your wife?"

"I don't know."

He spoke quite simply. It was manifestly the plain statement of a fact.

"Is she travelling, then? You are rather mysterious."

"There is no mystery. We are living apart."

"But"—Hilary was amazed—"I thought, to you, marriage—I mean the ceremony—would be a sacred bond?"

Carbis rose, went to the door and took up his sacramental case. "It is," he said, "supremely sacred."

CHAPTER IV

CARBIS's object in making his disclosure to Hilary had not been to draw sympathy to himself or to excite curiosity in himself. Both these results, however, he had succeeded in effecting. His object had been the benevolent one of enabling his friend to view his disabilities with less concern; and there he had conspicuously failed. For Hilary was far too close an analyst to fail to detect the false analogy. Carbis, evidently, had been the victim of some fortuitous calamity such as would overtake individuals in any régime. His own complaint was not for anything he suffered as an individual, but for what he suffered as a member of a class, as a unit of humanity. Should some kindly disposed fairy, with a tender interest in his particular welfare, have presented him suddenly with a bounty of a thousand a year, his quarrel with the world would have remained unaffected, though it would no longer have had a personal stimulus.

Yet the insight into Carbis's character, which the disclosure gave, was not without its influence in fortifying his own. There was something heroic, it seemed to him, in the spectacle of this young cleric, proceeding steadily about the work that lay before him, sincerely teaching his gospel of gentle-

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ness, carrying sympathy with him and assurance and help, in his round of duty and out of it, while bearing, without complaint and without bitterness, what was clearly a very grievous burden.

There was an element of paradox — a shadow of vital and tragic sources — in this secret in his life which appealed strongly to Hilary's sense of drama. No commonplace matrimonial quarrel, no ordinary failure to pull together, resulting in estrangement, could be conjectured. Carbis could not be living separate, in opposition to his creed and his conscience, immuring himself in perpetual, rigorous celibacy, for less than irresistible cause.

For several days following the conversation in his sitting-room the subject remained constantly in his thoughts. It lay on him with a saddening oppression; and yet, contrarily, it produced a lively, simmering excitement. For it was something outside the level mediocrity of his existence — something which brought him in touch, however remotely, with the world of pulse and actuality where drama works, and where the great human forces move and have their being. For a time he had some impression that he would learn more of the circumstances of Carbis's marriage; but the latter did not return to the subject, and he himself ventured no further reference to it. Gradually, as day followed day in normal, uneventful course, the fact itself lost its vividness and receded more and more into the hinterland of his mind.

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An incident a week or two later recalled it. It was Saturday afternoon—the afternoon in the week which took him from the grindstone, much to his content. After a leisurely hour in his rooms, he was leaving the house, with the initial object of making some personal and domestic purchases, when he was surprised to see a motor-car, which he had been watching in the course of a smooth and easy progress up the street, stop at the gate. The chauffeur left his place and opened the door for a woman in furs, the solitary occupant, who got out. Hilary was struck by her clear, pale skin and her grave eyes, and by an air of quiet self-reliance, both in her bearing and her expression. It was not a common type of face—not one that he would be likely to forget. Had he beheld her from a distance and as one of a crowd, probably he would simply have admired her; as it was, she gave him the feeling—to which he was keenly susceptible, and which he rather resented being made to experience—that his own personality was of remarkably small account in the world. And he felt it more—and perhaps resented it more—in this case because it was produced by no parade of conscious superiority to average humanity, but by the simple possession of innate distinction.

He half paused involuntarily at the gate, thinking her errand might be with him. She passed him, however, with an indifferent glance and walked up to the door.

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Hilary proceeded down the street at a pace slightly in excess of his normal one, his mind bubbling. He was annoyed with himself for having partly stopped. He felt he had done it clumsily. Probably he had looked idiotically expectant. She must have thought him a fatuous ass.

Looking back, he could not understand how he had come to suppose, even for a moment, that her visit could be to him. He had never known such a woman in his life, and never would. Men with such women in their lives were not closeted in the perpetual half-light of a country solicitor's office. He wondered, with a tweak of amusement, what would be her view of a man whose field of intellectual effort was bounded by the satisfactory phrasing of a "Statement of Claim" on the back of a writ.

Then his thoughts, coursing along an inevitable channel, passed from his personal friction and became speculative. As she had not come to see him, she must have come to see Carbis. Was she his wife? Could she be his wife? Hilary flushed at the vivid colour of the supposition. Carbis was a man strongly reserved and self-controlled, somewhat inscrutable, suggesting hidden potencies. Men of such nature appealed to women of powerful individualities. She might have thought she could draw out his contained force and press it into lines of her own choosing; and he might have rebelled. Certainly she was a woman whom imagination

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could naturally link with some uncommon and fateful event. It was difficult to conceive her cooped in the plain routine of simple domestic cares. She was as unlike ordinary women as a white *Cochet* is unlike a hedge-rose.

Hilary's cogitations had carried him so far when he reached the Anlaby Road. Immediately round the corner to the right were two flourishing shops. The first was a grocer's. Hilary did not remember ever to have been inside it, though he was aware that it supplied him with various commodities, none separately striking, but whose aggregate withdrawal would have left noticeable gaps in his daily fare. The second was a wine-merchant's, and with the interior of this he was on terms of easy intimacy, for the proprietor enjoyed his patronage — that is to say, he received the order for his weekly bottle of whisky. To-day he turned into it mechanically; his mind was still busily following the train of thought started by the woman in the motor-car.

Another customer was before him. Hilary waited beside him, indistinctly cognizant of his environment and of the purport of his visit. Force of habit took three-and-sixpence from his pocket and laid it on the counter; but he did not notice that the previous customer was retreating through the door of the shop until he heard his friend the wine-merchant inquiring politely if he should book his customary order.

"Yes, please," said Hilary, coming back with a

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startled rush to his immediate surroundings. "Teacher's. I'm sorry. That's right, isn't it? Good-morning. Nice weather."

He remembered, as he was moving away, that it was afternoon, and that it was blustery and inclined to be foggy. Indeed, his ear dimly caught the wine-merchant's measured and pleasant "Good-afternoon" mingling with his own precipitate utterances. But he was wise enough not to vignette them by obeying his impulse to turn round and correct them. He walked out of the shop, suffering withering judgment at the tribunal of his own mind, and reverted almost immediately to his previous thoughts.

By this time he had definitely concluded that the woman was Carbis's wife. Furthermore, he had reached the conjecture that the difference between them was a religious one. Possibly she was a devout Roman Catholic. She looked like a Roman Catholic — there was mystery, intensity, power suggested in her. Possibly, too — Hilary's imagination bore him on without break, his blood flushing at the spring of each new illuminating thought in his chain of surmise — possibly, too, she had deliberately concealed it until after the marriage, knowing that it would constitute an insuperable obstacle if disclosed before. Then must have followed the inevitable severance. The woman would not renounce her faith, and certainly Carbis would never renounce his. Nothing would move him,

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Hilary knew, against his conscience. The woman was apparently well off, so he had evidently had to relinquish some worldly good. If they loved one another — utterly, as two such natures could love — the drama was tremendous, a double monument to the conquest by the human will of the human body. Obviously the purpose of her visit to-day was to make a new appeal, to put forth all her strength in a struggle urged by the combined forces of human demand and religious conviction. And in that struggle she would bring to bear upon physical man, as her faith permitted, the pulsing arguments of physical woman. His temporal being for herself and his eternal being for her Church! What a momentous mission! What a stake to fight for! Good heavens! with such an errand in front of her, that he could have imagined for one moment she was coming to see *him* — *him*!

It would be a wonderful scene, he thought, a terrific scene, this pitting of the separated consciences and endurances of two lovers — beginning quietly, filling in volume and strength, rising to passion, but never weakening to loss of control — a great scene, the sort of scene that would stage well.

At that point in his reflections he was again recalled to immediate actualities, and, sequentially, to his office desk and furnished apartments and stationary salary, this time by a gentleman in Norfolk, unburdened by any considerable weight of years, who was proceeding along the pavement at a

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leisured gait. He had changed into knee-breeches for the afternoon, and wore them with the easy habitude of a country squire. Hilary knew him, however, as the hard-worked and hard-working employé of a firm of oil and cake merchants. If you informed him suddenly that linseed was standing at forty-four shillings and oil at twenty-two, he could tell you without resorting to paper the lowest price of oil-cake which would show a profit on crushing seed. He did not consider it even an accomplishment to be able to do so. He was rather ashamed of knowing. It is a striking testimony to the persistent incongruity in human nature, that those who could be proud of doing much seize every opportunity to try to gull the world into the belief that they do nothing.

He hailed Hilary with pleasant languor. "Hello, Thornton! Rotten day, isn't it? What on earth is one to do?"

He stood with his legs slightly apart, and folded his arms, dangling a stick from beneath his elbow.

After taking a moment or two to recognise him, Hilary endorsed his view of the weather, and asked where he was going.

"Haven't a notion!" replied the youth, with the air of one who regarded object and occupation as concerns of the vulgar multitude.

He swung his head a careless point to look at the motor-car which was backing out of the side-street to turn. "That's a nice car," he approbated,

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after a pause which suggested expert examination.

He knew precisely as much about motor-cars as he knew about military balloons. This one, however, was superficially satisfying; it was elegantly painted and upholstered, and its brasswork shone.

"You know whose it is?" he asked casually.

"No," said Hilary; "I should rather like to."

"It's Mrs. Randolph Wynne's."

Hilary stared at him, amazed. "Do you mean *the* Mrs. Randolph Wynne?"

"The writer," said the other in a voice which deprecated such show of common impression at the mention of a celebrity. "She lives down here — somewhere Sutton way. I saw her in it a few moments ago."

"Yes; so did I," said Hilary — "at least, I saw someone. I didn't know it was she."

The youth unfolded his arms and put his hands on his hips. "Striking face," he remarked.

Hilary needed a few moments to reorganize his ideas. "Yes," he said, "she has rather a striking face."

CHAPTER V

DELORAINE WYNNE, unconscious of the interest she had excited in the mind of the managing clerk of Cubitt's, walked up to the door of 89, Bolton Street, and rang the bell. In the temporary absence of her handmaiden, the landlady, after such supplementary attention to her toilet as seemed to be called for, answered the summons herself. Deloraine asked if Mr. Carbis was in.

"I think so, madam. I'll go and see. What name shall I say?"

"Mrs. Randolph Wynne."

The combination, familiar on so many lips, might have been "Mrs. Smith" for the effect it produced on the good housewife; but Deloraine saw that she was impressed by the motor-car in the background.

She left her with apologies, and went sharply up the stairs.

"A lady to see you, sir," she said, entering Carbis's room after a punctilious knock. She went inside and closed the door with careful noiselessness. "A lady of consequence, I should judge, sir. She's wearing sables and came in a motor-car, with her own chauffeur. She's different from those that usually come to see you," the poor woman couldn't help adding, out of a soul harrowed by the perpet-

ual contact of the inadequately washed with her furniture.

"Did she give her name?"

"Wynne, I think she said," replied the landlady — "Mrs. Something Wynne."

"Mrs. Randolph Wynne?"

"That was it, sir."

"We are honoured, Mrs. Cranford," said Carbis. "Mrs. Wynne is a great personage. Do you think the room is sufficiently tidy?"

He got up and emptied a tray of cigarette ash into the fire, and bestowed a pair of slippers into a remoter corner than the angle of the chimney. Mrs. Cranford, meanwhile, deftly dusted her glass-enclosed cork model of York Cathedral, which Carbis had placed behind a photograph frame, into a position of view. Carbis had been firmer than Hilary in dealing with his room or less compunctious. Quite pleasantly, but without indecision, he had rearranged it in some conformity with his æsthetic sense. A plain paper had supplanted the previous decorative design, with its frieze of floral festoons, transformed, by being hung upside down, into a series of horticultural arches. The prints on the walls were his own and the taffeta curtains. He had looked long and thoughtfully at a framed illuminated text, exhorting him to "Pray without ceasing"; finally had skirted the difficulty by mislaying it during the paper-hanging operations.

"That will do, I think," he said, as Mrs. Cran-

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ford was attempting to impart a hasty additional burnish to the ormolu clock on the mantelpiece. "Now invite our visitor to come and see the effect."

He was standing in the middle of the room when Deloraine entered.

"You know why I've come?" she said.

"I think I can guess."

"Yes; I want to talk about Pearl." She took a step forward and looked at him with simple directness. "If you resent my taking an interest in your affairs — it would not be unnatural — say so quite plainly, and I will go away. I shall not be offended. But you must credit me with a sincere desire to serve you, and not with idle interference."

"If nothing else excluded it, your position and your busy life shield you from any such supposition."

"Thank you. Now may I sit down?"

"Please do."

His manner was not responsive. A woman less sure of herself and less practised in perceiving the essential in human character might have been discouraged. She had met Carbis only twice before, and neither time had had much opportunity to get to know him, but she had looked through his Oxford manner to the permanent elements beneath. Moreover, in her intercourse with her fellows, she was accustomed to find them involuntarily stiff: her name produced constraint. They were talking to "someone"; they could not be quite natural.

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Lastly, the subject she had come to discuss was so delicate and personal that she would possibly have esteemed him less had he accepted her interest in it with eager cordiality.

She sat down and pushed back the furs from her neck. Then she leaned towards Carbis, and in a moment ceased to be the distinguished writer, and became simply, spontaneously, and persuasively feminine. She wished to win his confidence; and she realized that, with this man, she could safely and effectively decline from the glamour of her individuality, and depend upon those qualities of natural appeal which she shared with the rest of her sex.

"You see," she said, "since — since your marriage — Pearl and I have made friends. Before — well, she always held her head splendidly high; she was always splendidly calm, but I knew she was a little afraid of me. She would never let me prove to her how human I am. But since she has come back, she has found me out and trusted me. There was no one else, you see."

"There was her mother," said Carbis.

"How curious men are!" For a moment or two Deloraine changed her manner. It was the close student of human life, the woman who had felt and thought and achieved, who looked at him with grave interest. "That you, with your knowledge, your experience, can say, 'There was her mother'!"

"It was she who was responsible for — for — the mistake in her life. She was her natural succour after that mistake had occurred."

"It was her mother," said Deloraine, "who reared her in a glass house, who guarded her from any breath of knowledge of the world or of herself, who imbued her with impossible ideas of personal conduct; but it was her mother who was the first to upbraid for pushing those ideas to their logical conclusion."

"It is difficult to bring up girls too carefully," said Carbis.

"*You can say that— you!*"

"Now and then an individual may have to suffer — as I have had to — but far better that than the results which might follow any loosening of care."

Deloraine leaned back in her chair, put her hands in her muff, and looked at him calmly. "You are accustomed to tell people home truths," she said, "and I dare say they generally deserve them, and that it is good for them to be told. Well, you must let me tell you one, in turn, because you have deserved it and it will be good for you. When you talk in that way — you whose life has been broken, and whose career perhaps ruined, by such upbringing — when you talk in that way, you have passed the point when one can admire you, and are merely a self-effacing automaton. Your altruism ceases to be altruism and becomes affectation."

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Those accustomed to deliver reproof are often the least disposed to receive it. At this candid statement Carbis felt a hot flush of anger. It seemed to him that this woman had no right to come into his rooms and talk to him like that. The feeling softened before he replied, but the softening was produced by his habit of control. Not till later did he perceive the truth of her words; not till later still did the perception bear fruit.

"You are not necessarily right," he said, "in seeing altruism in my attitude, or the affectation of altruism. I may be suffering the punishment of my own failure. I am not a man of the world. I may have blundered in some way."

"From what I have learnt from Pearl, I don't think the fault was on your side," said Deloraine. "Well, we can't talk about those things."

"No," said Carbis.

The tragedy of Carbis's marriage was not to be discussed between man and woman. His wife had come to him a virgin in thought and imagination, a child of such immaculate purity and innocence as could appeal to his conceptions. Quite honestly he had fired her with enthusiasm for himself and his work. Her young spirit was exalted by the thought of sharing the exactions and the consolations of his high calling. She believed in him intensely. She looked forward to a life of joint endeavour and joint sacrifice, helped and sustained and rewarded by the intimate sympathy and devo-

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tion ever flowing from one to the other. On such lines their conversations about the future had run always during the period of betrothal. Then had come the marriage and the revelation and the crash. Into one blinding moment was concentrated the full discovery of the world's bondage to the flesh. The man she had revered and honoured, whose high aspirations and strong purpose and indomitable spirit and wide sympathy had given her assurance at once of a safe shelter in stress and weakness and of a steadfast beacon to fortify her courage, was a brute, a trafficker in unspeakable things, a vile meddler in the crudest conditions of humanity, the mere private cognizance of which was a source of secret shame.

Distraught and overthrown, sick with misery and fear and shame, stricken in the very centre of her soul by this tremendous shivering and shattering, by the falling away of the base and bed-rock upon which all her ideals had been fixed, she had fled from his touch, from his sight — fled in trembling secret haste to the refuge of her mother's house.

Her mother at first had soothed her, then remonstrated, chided, lost patience; but nothing could remove the horror she had conceived of her husband. When Carbis came she shuddered and shrank from him; and he saw that the revulsion against him was so genuine and deep that he adopted, with desolated bewilderment but without hesitation, the only course open to a man of his in-

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stinct and standards. He resigned the benefice to which his mother-in-law had nominated him, and accepted a subordinate post, with a curate's salary, in the slums of Hull; bearing his unexpected burden with the simple manfulness that was partly inherent and partly the result of his acquired practice of self-discipline.

"We can't talk about the past," Deloraine reaffirmed. "But, as Pearl's friend and one who wishes to be yours, I should like to talk about the future."

Carbis was sitting sideways at his desk. He drew a small book towards him, and mechanically rotated it on its edges. "I esteem you very much," he said slowly, "and I admire your work —"

"I didn't come for compliments," smiled Deloraine.

"Though I can't always agree with it."

"Nor for criticism."

"And I am sure of your disinterested motive; but I think Pearl and I will have to be left to work out for ourselves the solution of our own difficulty."

"Then you will always remain at a deadlock. I can't see how anything else is possible."

The uncompromising statement brought sufficient dismay into his incommunicative face to show her that in his heart he cherished hope to the contrary. "Pearl is very young," he said. "Time will work for us, and growth."

"But what growth can you expect at West

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Drewton under the ægis of Mrs. Swete-Evans? Growth of frame, perhaps, but stagnation of mind, vacuum of experience."

"I think there is a natural expansion which is outside the control of environment," said Carbis. Almost without being conscious of it, he was being drawn on to talk of his affairs.

"Admitting that," said Deloraine, "it must be a long and tedious process, and it is difficult to see how you are to take advantage of it. I want you to think if it wouldn't be better to have someone in the other camp to fight your battle quietly, and to tell you when and how to come in and strike for yourself."

Her grave eyes were looking at him earnestly. Their influence suddenly penetrated the mail of Carbis's manner.

"Mrs. Wynne, you're awfully kind," he said. It was not the priest who spoke, nor the carefully disciplined man, but the boy with a responsive heart who had gone from school to Oxford, and who still retained the hidden foundation of this later and severer superstructure.

"Oh, I knew you had it in you!" exclaimed Deloraine happily, again revealing herself the simple spontaneous woman.

"With all your interests and all the calls upon your time, why should you trouble about us — two very humble ordinary people who have made rather a mess of things?"

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"Because you are really children, both of you, and because I'm fond of Pearl, and because I hate to see people unhappy anyhow. Now will you let me help you?"

"Is Pearl unhappy?" asked Carbis a little acutely.

Deloraine looked closely at him. "Of course she is unhappy. How could it be possible for her to be anything else?"

"She can't regret me."

"She regrets what she thought you were. She regrets her shattered ideals — her impossible ideals," she added.

"Yes," said Carbis. He rotated the little book again slowly.

"May I help you?"

"Yes," he said again; "yes, if you will."

"Well, Pearl ought not to be at home. As long as she is at home, it is hopeless to think of any change in her."

"I couldn't wish her to have any better companionship than yours."

"But I am very much occupied, and I am going away. I don't live at West Drewton all the year round. I only go there for quietness. Usually I am in London in the winter, but this year I shall be at Cannes and Nice. Pearl must come with me to Cannes, Mr. Carbis."

He dropped the little book. Cannes and Nice? He was not a Calvinist; he shocked some of his more rigid brethren by his wholehearted encour-

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agement of legitimate pleasures. But the irresponsible Riviera — the fine line it drew between the trivial and the vital — struck him with a vague fear in connection with his innocent, unsullied, untutored Pearl — without his guidance and help. And it was so far! He waited without replying.

"It will widen her outlook," Deloraine continued. "She will do things and see things and meet people — people of the world — my husband's friends more than mine. He proposes to honour me, I hear, with a share of his company while I am there."

She threw in the last sentence in a tone of explanatory parenthesis, which assumed that — as was the case — the intermittence of her matrimonial tie was fairly generally understood. Carbis had heard vaguely that her husband was a fashionable man-about-town, with an elastic sense of connubial claims.

"Your husband!" he said, with a distinct note of dismay.

"Well, candidly," said Deloraine, smiling, "he is not a man I should look upon as the best companion for a girl inclined to be flighty. But Pearl's tendency is rather seriously the reverse, isn't it? and he is not likely to subject either of us to a surfeit of his society. And at least he knows the world, and he has graceful manners."

"I think I would rather she did not go," said Carbis, after a short hesitation.

"You see, you take fright at the very things

which it is almost necessary she should be brought in contact with. We must imbue her unworldliness with a leaven of worldliness."

She worded her phrases pliantly, but she gave the impression, in all her statements, of absolute belief in the soundness of her own judgment; and usually the effect was to inspire her hearers with a similar conviction — often to the point of enthusiasm. Carbis was essentially self-contained, but even he could not altogether escape the influence of Deloraine's virile personality. He felt — as everyone felt — that it would be useless and foolish to argue with her. He would be worsted dialectically and certainly achieve nothing in substance. In a matter affecting his conscience, or upon which he had formed a decided opinion, he would have simply withstood her, and so produced a blank issue. But in the present instance his feeling was just sufficiently fluid to be amenable to her suasion.

"Do you think this might be the means of bringing about an understanding?" he asked. "I feel an immense confidence in you."

"Yes," said Deloraine slowly, "I think it might."

His wording of the question made it possible for her to answer it with a simple affirmative. So great had been the shock of disillusion that in her heart she feared the effect could never be entirely exorcised; but she believed it could be softened — so softened that, with a man of Carbis's tempera-

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ment and continence, a joint life could become possible.

"Then I needn't say any more."

"And I may take Pearl to Cannes?"

"I don't think I could prevent you." He smiled.

"Yes, but I want your co-operation. I want to feel that what I can do will be done *with* you and *for* you. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Carbis.

"And I have your good-will?"

"Not only that: you have my gratitude. You are voluntarily undertaking a service which I could have had no right to ask or to think of."

Deloraine got up. She stood with her hands in her muff and looked straight into his face as he rose to open the door.

"Before I go, I should like to say just one word of sympathy. You deserved much better luck, and I do hope it will all come right."

Once again the sincerity in her eyes forced a way through his armour of manner. With a rush which took him unprepared the springs of rigidly suppressed emotion broke to the surface and stood in his lids.

"I hope so," he said.

CHAPTER VI

HILARY had a vague feeling, on returning to his rooms, that he must learn something of the purport of the great writer's visit to Carbis. Nothing followed to substantiate it. Mrs. Cranford duly informed him of the notable occurrence, when she was clearing his dinner-table, and stated furthermore that Mr. Carbis had hardly seemed to be quite himself when seeing the lady into her car. Indeed, the good woman had this evening personally undertaken an office usually assigned to her maid for the single purpose of hearing Hilary's views upon the event of the afternoon.

"You might almost have thought, sir," she remarked, as she swept the crumbs without haste into her tray, "that she'd brought him some bad news."

Hilary, however, was not to be drawn into a speculative discussion of his neighbour's affairs. He had a wholesome dislike of personal gossip, even with his equals. He recognised with more than common force the essential meanness of obtaining pleasure by impertinent examination of the inner lives and private concerns of others. Even biographies he read with a certain sheepishness, enjoying them, in a sense, against his conscience.

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But on the present occasion, though he would not dance to his landlady's fiddling, he was undoubtedly consumed with curiosity. He was acutely sensible to the magic of names — not inherited names, but names that had been won. A visit from a territorial lord, or even from a prince of the blood, would not have interested him, except perhaps to give a fleeting fillip to his latent spirit of socialism, as when his bicycle was swept into the stones at the roadside by the clattering passage of some caparisoned equipage. But Mrs. Randolph Wynne had a place above her fellows by individual achievement. That spoke to his imagination vividly.

As he sat in his room he could hear Carbis, from time to time, walking about on the floor above. He seemed more restless than usual. That did not surprise him. What on earth could Mrs. Wynne have had to say to him — Mrs. Wynne, the novelist, the dramatist, the philosophic writer, the president of half a dozen women's societies, the woman who had wrung from the world by her intellect the rarely conceded right to unfettered personal action and public utterance? What could such a woman have to say to a poor curate, working unostentatiously in an ordinary provincial parish?

After a while the door above opened, and Carbis's step sounded on the stairs. He was going out, Hilary feared; he had services and meetings

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at all hours. He reached the ground-floor; he was passing. No; the short knock, and then the curate came into the room.

"Are you busy?" he asked. "If not, I thought I would smoke a pipe with you."

Hilary jumped up with his usual hospitable alacrity from a posture of sprawling ease. He felt it was very decent of Carbis to come and talk to him quietly in this way about his interesting visitor. But Carbis had nothing at all to say about his visitor. He spoke of the weather; he told Hilary various little incidents and experiences that had befallen him in the course of his work; he discussed the shipping industry, and touched on politics; finally, he said good-night and went back to his room.

Hilary stared into the fire, when he had gone, in blank amazement. Here was a man who, for an hour that afternoon, had been closeted with one of the most remarkable women of the age, and who did not even mention the fact incidentally in a subsequent conversation!

He had taken his share in the talk, however, without giving evidence of his momentary expectation that the salient topic would be introduced, even hastening from subject to subject, lest he should appear to be purposely leaving an opening; and Carbis, for his part, had been quite unconscious of it. It did not occur to him so much as to consider whether Hilary would be likely to have heard that

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Mrs. Wynne had been to see him. Her visit, stirring up poignant griefs not yet six months old, had left him disturbed and unhappy, and he had felt the need of companionship and impersonal talk.

He imagined that a day or two would enable him to regain his previous attitude of detachment. But, as time proceeded, he found it appreciably more difficult than hitherto to master himself completely, to crush his sorrow into the background. Deloraine had blown the spark of hope into a brighter glow, and that remained before him insistently. He watched the posts for her first letter from Cannes with an eagerness which he could not subdue. This came about a month after her visit. On the whole, the tone was sanguine. Pearl had not wanted to come, and at first, after her arrival, she had been inclined to isolate herself, to hold almost disdainfully aloof from intercourse with the people she met; but lately she had seemed a little more willing to yield to the spirit of the life about her. This was followed, after a lapse of a further six weeks, by a second letter, bearing out the promise of the former one. Pearl had lost much of her reserve, and appeared brighter and more natural than she had been at any time since her marriage. Two months later came a third letter — a short one, but almost enthusiastic. They were now at Nice, and Pearl was a changed being, glowing with health and spirits, entering freely into the amusements of the Carnival, holding her own in

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light-hearted chatter — imbued, in short, with the colour and light and vivid essence of the place. Deloraine had not yet introduced the deeper note of her relations with her husband; she thought it best to wait, to let her enjoy herself irresponsibly while she had the inclination, and to get the new experience and the new knowledge fully into her veins. But in the quieter time which would follow, when the excitement had passed and her widened outlook remained, she hoped a *rapprochement* might become possible.

The next letter came from West Drewton. Pearl was not settling at home very well; she was high-spirited and melancholy by turns. Deloraine had opened the subject of a renewal of married conditions, but it had not been well received. She had passed it carelessly and a little acridly. Altogether her manner was spasmodic and unlike herself. Deloraine was puzzled.

A fortnight later this was followed by a startling communication. His wife had gone to London, ostensibly to visit friends, but had since written admitting that that had been a prevarication to enable her to get away without argument and trying scenes with her mother. She had come to the conclusion, she wrote, that a woman could not fulfil her destiny in the constricting atmosphere of a country village. She felt that she had it in her to take her place in the world, and she meant to be independent; further, that her position at West Drewton, as a wife with-

out a husband, had become intolerable. It seemed to her that, since her marriage had proved a failure, she owed it to her relatives, as well as to herself, to attempt to make a success of her life in some other way. She thought of studying music, for which she had a distinct talent. She sent no address, but promised to furnish one when she had made sufficient headway to justify the course she was pursuing and to prevent interference with it. In the meantime, they need not be anxious about her; she had taken enough money to provide for her needs for some time; she had friends, and she could look after herself.

Deloraine's comments on this were those of a woman who had herself faced the world and who believed in independent feminine effort. She did not feel that Pearl was really fitted for such a life, but she thought it was possibly a necessary step in her development. In any case, it proved that she had at least effectually cast her infant swaddling clothes, and a bold and firm advance on the part of her husband might clinch the situation in the near future. But she begged Carbis to be patient. Mrs. Swete-Evans had put inquiries on foot for the purpose of discovering Pearl's whereabouts. If those were successful, she — Deloraine — would go to London and see her. Then she might have to send for him.

So Carbis awaited his summons.

CHAPTER VII

THE articled clerk who shared Hilary's room at Cubitt's was a young gentleman who paid some attention to dress, and who, by dint of assiduous practice, could make a thirty break at billiards once a month. He usually reached the office between ten-thirty and eleven, and then wished to discuss the day's news.

At some such hour he presented himself one morning in April, a few weeks after Deloraine had sent her last letter to Carbis.

"Good-morning, Mr. Thornton," he said cheerfully.

"Good-morning," said Hilary, without looking up from his papers. He had given up making any comment upon the time of his pupil's arrival. The articled clerk knows perfectly well that he is not a salaried servant of his firm — indeed, that he has paid a premium for the privilege of sharing in its work — and he conducts himself conformably.

"I say, what do you think of this extraordinary Price case?"

"Rather fishy," replied Hilary, still writing.

"I thought Carrington's cross-examination was pretty weak, didn't you?"

"I didn't read it all."

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"Just listen to this." The artiled clerk sat down and unfolded a newspaper.

"I can't talk," said Hilary. "Will you examine these summonses with me?" He passed him across several printed forms, with extensive manuscript supplements, and began reading from copies in his own hands, the other checking.

When the matter was concluded, the young man picked up a bundle of deeds wrapped in brown paper from the floor beside him, with a heavy sigh. He loosened the string, letting out the musty odour of old parchment, and filliped his fingers.

"It always seems to me," he said, as he slowly opened a seven-skin mortgage, "that making these long elaborate abstracts of title is only a dodge to run up costs. Why can't you simply say to the other side that you've got such and such deeds, and they can come and look at them? I don't believe anyone ever looks at the abstract until they compare it with the deeds, and then they seem to imagine that their only object is to make the abstract fuller — as though that mattered a ginger-nut. I've done fifteen pages already, and I'm barely half-way through. How much do they charge a page?"

"I don't know," said Hilary.

"Ten shillings, I believe. And I pay to be allowed to do it. It must be a profitable business."

"I never said it wasn't," said Hilary tersely.

With many complaints the young gentleman folded the unwieldy document in such a way as to

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make it possible to read the passage he was copying with tolerable comfort. Then he dipped his pen in the ink, and carefully placed a pad of blotting-paper beneath his wrist.

"*'And reciting,'*" he breathed with weary emphasis, as he underlined the words. "My hat, it does take an imagination to do this, Mr. Thornton."

The scraping of their two pens was interrupted presently by the opening of the door. A clerk put his head inside.

"Would you go down to Mr. Cubitt's room, sir?"

"Mr. Cubitt's?" asked Hilary, a little surprised. Such summonses came to him, as a rule, only from the pushing junior partner. The head of the firm was accustomed to conduct his dignified, leisurely work in the spacious comfort of his private office without other assistance than that of his confidential shorthand clerk. So close was the association between this man and his master that it was believed among the staff that he knew more about the eminent solicitor's personal affairs than even his own wife. To Hilary, however, he was almost a stranger.

It was the confidential clerk who had looked into the room. "Yes," he replied. "There is a client with him," he added, and went out.

At the prospect of a designed and appointed personal interview Hilary was never able to subdue a slight heightening of nervous tension, even when

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some fairly intimate acquaintance had to be seen. In the present instance the feeling was accentuated. He was conscious of the blood tingling beneath his skin, curiously depressing and curiously uncontrollable — the sensation of a patient when he is shown into the ponderous gloom of a distinguished physician's waiting-room. It was a handicap which it had been ordained he should carry through life.

He made some unnecessary readjustment of the articles on his desk, and then rose and went down, straightening his coat. Mr. Cubitt's door was carefully padded at the edges with pneumatic tubing. Everyone who essayed to enter it was startled by the fancy that the staid owner of the room was strenuously opposing his entrance by pushing on the other side. Having overcome the resistance after two or three somewhat apologetic efforts, Hilary entered, and found that the solicitor — an elderly man with a courtly manner and a cold eye — was not stretched upon his back on the floor, but was seated unemotionally at his large double-fronted desk. He held a slip of paper in one of his carefully trimmed hands, and had slightly turned to face a well-dressed woman who was seated in a low, leather-covered chair before the fire, quietly composed and at her ease. Her position allowed only a partial view of her from the door, and she barely moved her head when Hilary entered. But he recognised her. He had seen that pale face and that calm, grave air before. With a flush of sur-

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face embarrassment and a thrill of underflowing excitement, he recognised her.

They were neither of them speaking. Evidently they had been waiting for him.

"This is Mrs. Randolph Wynne," said Mr. Cubitt in his trained, punctilious voice. "Will you sit down, Mr. Thornton."

It was not an introduction — merely a necessary informatory prelude to a business statement. Hilary took the chair which his employer appeared to indicate, at the opposite side of the wide desk. In this position he was still partially behind Mrs. Wynne, a circumstance for which he was grateful. So placed, the feeling she gave him of his own insignificance was less insistent than it would have been had he been facing her. During the last few months the interest and curiosity stirred in his mind by her visit to Carbis had subsided — indeed, the episode had almost been forgotten. His fellow-lodger had never referred to it, and she had not come again. It was vividly revived by the present sight of her, seated tranquilly before his employer's fire. He wondered if the two incidents were connected. Was he to have a part in the circumstances of her life which had already included Carbis? He thrilled at the prospect, and yet shrank from it with the inalienable diffidence and self-distrust that was part of his being.

Mr. Cubitt turned to him.

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"I shall want you to make a journey to London," he said. "I am at liberty to relate the facts shortly for Mr. Thornton's guidance?" he said parenthetically to his client.

"Oh yes!"

She did not look at Hilary. She classed him, he felt, with the furniture — as part of the office machinery; and slightly — very slightly — he resented it. Had she been an ordinary moneyed client, he would have resented it fiercely. She was obviously completely unconscious that she had ever seen him before.

"Mrs. Wynne has consulted me," continued Mr. Cubitt, "with reference to the state of affairs prevailing between herself and her husband. Her marriage with Mr. Randolph Wynne has not, I regret to hear, proved in all respects satisfactory. For some years Mr. Wynne had quite evaded his responsibilities, visiting his wife only at intervals, following his own pursuits and devices without reference to her, while calling upon her from time to time to supply the means for his expensive tastes. Of late the position has developed into rarer visits and commoner demands for money. Mrs. Wynne has endeavoured again and again, without avail, to induce him to return to a more regular mode of life. In these circumstances, she now feels that no course remains to her — and I agree with her — but to put an end, once and for all, to the residue

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of relations which may still be said to subsist. I have therefore taken her instructions for a deed of separation."

Mr. Cubitt pressed his immaculately shaven lips and made a few slight additions to the notes on the sheet of paper in his hand; then closed and returned his heavy gold pencil-case to his pocket.

"It is for the purpose of obtaining Mr. Wynne's signature to this document, when it has been prepared, that your journey is primarily necessary. He is not a man of business and frequently fails to attend to his correspondence as carefully as could be wished. You follow me?"

"Quite," said Hilary. His heart was sinking. Mr. Cubitt's phrases were elegantly chosen, but he deduced from them, without much difficulty, that he was likely to have to deal with a man who would be quite capable of giving him a short reception.

"The deed will contain a clause," the solicitor proceeded, "providing for the payment to Mr. Wynne by his wife of the sum of two hundred pounds annually. You will point out to him that this allowance is in no sense a right which he is entitled to demand or expect, but that Mrs. Wynne makes it as a spontaneous act of good-will, in recognition of the relation that has existed between them, and because she is aware that his own resources are limited."

"He will say it is not enough," said Mrs. Wynne, without looking away from the fire.

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"In that case," proceeded Mr. Cubitt, addressing Hilary, "you will make it clear to him that, since this is a voluntary gift without consideration, the only end he can achieve by objecting to its amount will be its withdrawal."

"The consideration is that he shall cease harassing me," said Mrs. Wynne.

"Yes; but on our side," replied the solicitor, smiling upon her with a gentle suggestion of guile, "we must be careful not to let him into the secret that his importunities are a weapon."

"But I shouldn't like to think that he might be actually in want."

Mr. Cubitt turned to his distinguished client with the kindly admonishing air of a man who carried double her weight of years. "Now, you must let me point out that that attitude — very natural and very admirable — is precisely the one upon which such men as your husband trade. No doubt you have already suffered from his perception of it. It will be hopeless, I fear, to attempt to deal with him unless you are prepared to show a little firmness. This allowance is a graceful act, and he must so recognise it."

"You see, you don't know him, Mr. Cubitt," said Deloraine, at last turning round, with a little smile.

"I think I do," he replied. "I have had the advantage of a portrait from an artist exceptionally happy in portraiture." After which delicate com-

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pliment he turned again to his subordinate: "There is one other matter, Mr. Thornton. It is unnecessary to say that Mrs. Wynne can only make this allowance to her husband on the assumption that his habits are such as will not stultify her in pursuing that course. Various rumours have reached her with reference to his mode of life. These you must sift; you must make such inquiries or keep such observations as will satisfy you that they are unfounded. You will recognise the expediency of proceeding with tact and care."

His employer's stately manner and the presence of Mrs. Wynne affected Hilary, for the time being, with mental blight. He replied that he understood, and he said it with sufficient tone of confidence; but his understanding comprised little beyond the fact that he was required to play the private detective; a form of effort for which he had sometimes suspected in himself a latent capacity, but for which he felt by no means so qualified now that the necessity confronted him.

Mrs. Wynne rose. As she passed Hilary, she looked at him directly for the first time, and her face lighted in his favour with a gracious, sensitive smile. It came like the sudden warmth of the sun through level grey clouds and won him completely to her service.

"Thank you," she said, in a charming voice. "I hope my affairs will not be very troublesome to you."

CHAPTER VIII

MR. RANDOLPH WYNNE entered the breakfast-room of his chambers in Jermyn Street as the little timepiece on the buffet, with a single musical note, announced that it was half-past nine. He sat down at the table and unfolded his napkin, while his valet lifted the silver covers from the dishes.

"Kidneys," said Mr. Randolph Wynne. "The cook appears to display a conspicuous paucity of ideas, Challis."

"Yes, sir," said the valet.

"You can disgorge my letters."

"Yes, sir," said the valet again, and disappeared.

His master stirred his coffee and glanced round, with a contented, careless eye, upon the well-furnished room and the silver and white napery of the breakfast-table.

He was perfectly dressed, but without ostentation, and his manner and bearing had the easy, unconscious polish which is typical of the well-bred society man. He belonged to that numerous class whose means of fashionable livelihood is a mystery. He did everything and went everywhere: no one ever saw him walk half a mile if a hansom

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was within hail, or order an inferior claret at dinner; he was a member of two expensive clubs, and entertained parties at Ranelagh; he was seen regularly in the stalls at the theatres and the enclosures at race-meetings, and ranged idly in the trail of fashion between London and the Continental spas. Yet his settled income was known to be of the slenderest dimensions, and he boasted of the chronic stringency of his finances. Even his proficiency at bridge could hardly be supposed a sufficient means of revenue to supply his sumptuous tastes; yet he floated through life with the prosperous calm of a man with a stable four-figure balance at his bank. Sound and substantial in his physique, erect in his carriage, the approach of his fortieth year was indicated only by a few thin creases on his face, by hair receding a little from his temples, and by a slight tendency to corpulence.

The valet returned with four letters and the *Times*, which he silently placed on the table by his master's elbow.

Mr. Wynne took up the top letter without examining the remainder, and carelessly opened it. A slip with a trade heading was inside.

"SIR," (he read aloud)

"We regret to be obliged again to call your attention —"

He handed it to the valet, and the valet handed it to the waste-paper basket.

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He proceeded with his kidney, and presently opened the next. This contained an ordinary sheet of note-paper with a small crest embossed in the corner.

“DEAR WYNNE,” (he read in a rapid undertone)

‘Conspirator is a certainty for the City and Suburban. I owe you a good turn, so I let you know. It is not a chance to miss.’

“Know anything about Conspirator, Challis?” asked Mr. Wynne, returning the letter to its envelope.

“I hear good reports of him, sir.”

“Put me on a fiver each way.”

“Yes, sir.”

The valet removed his plate and placed a clean one in front of him. Mr. Wynne waved away the marmalade. While his attendant was procuring a dish of fruit, he took up the third letter. This was in a woman’s handwriting, and he did not confide its contents to his valet. The valet would read it later when he brushed his clothes.

“DEAREST RANDOLPH,” (Wynne read)

“Are you ill? It is more than a week since you have been to see me. I imagine the most foolish things. I have something to tell you. I am so anxious and so unhappy.”

He put the letter in his pocket. “What am I doing this afternoon, Challis?”

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Challis examined an engagement-book. "Lady Z., at 2.30," said he.

"To-morrow?"

"Mrs. Q., at four."

"Friday?"

"Lunch at the Junior National."

"What after?"

"Nothing at present."

"Book me Chelsea at four."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Wynne took some grapes on his plate and opened the last letter. He looked at the heading with slight surprise.

"DEAR SIR," (it ran)

"Mrs. Randolph Wynne and yourself. We are favoured with instructions in this matter by Mrs. Wynne, and our Mr. Thornton will call upon you thereon on Friday afternoon at 2.30 o'clock. Should you have an engagement at that hour, we shall feel obliged if you will kindly communicate with us by return of post, appointing a time which will suit your convenience.

"We are,

"Yours faithfully,

"CUBITT AND WELLS."

Mr. Wynne put a grape into his mouth and ate it thoughtfully.

"Ructions?" he speculated. "Surely not ructions, Challis?"

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"You expressed a little anxiety in March," said the valet, sweeping crumbs from the table.

"How long since I was down there?" said his master.

"It will be eight weeks this coming Saturday," replied Challis. "You went from Saturday till Tuesday, sir."

"That's too long. You shouldn't have let so long slip by."

"I ventured to mention," began the valet, "on one or two occasions —"

"Did you? Then you didn't mention it hard enough. I told you to mention it hard."

"You seemed a little put out at the moment, sir."

"Very probably. Undoubtedly she gets on my nerves, Challis. Too much success in this world is not good for anybody. In some respects the world is uncommonly easily pleased, you may have observed."

Challis apparently had not observed it.

"And whom the world delights to honour the individual desires to avoid. You might make a note of that; it may be useful to my biographer."

"Now here is the fruit of the world's plaudits." He looked at the letter again. "I've treated her with invariable kindness."

"I believe so, sir."

"You believe so! I say, I have." Mr. Wynne waited between his sentences to place grape-pips

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on his plate with a slender fork. "Always treat your wife kindly, Challis."

"Yes, sir," said Challis.

"Then she can never divorce you. Dear me! — tell the fruiterer his grapes are all pips."

"Yes, sir," said Challis.

"You will find, as you go through life," proceeded Mr. Wynne, "that women are persistently trying to evade their responsibilities."

"Indeed, sir."

"A wife's first duty is to her husband. Always see that she remembers that."

"Yes, sir," said Challis.

"Now, you can tell 'our Mr. Thornton,' when he arrives, that I'm out."

"Yes, sir."

"You can tell him that I'm in America."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Wynne threw down his table-napkin and got up. "You are a little inclined to be governed by impulse, Challis. Your judgment has a tendency to be hasty. It seems to me that nothing will be lost by learning exactly what is in the wind. You can tell Mr. Thornton that I'll see him."

"You're due at Chelsea at four," said the valet, reading from the engagement-list, "and you're lunching at the Junior National Club at 1.15."

"Send him there, then. Tell him I'll see him at the Club."

"Yes, sir," said Challis.

CHAPTER IX

THE Junior National Club is a spacious and imposing building, whose portals are approached by a wide flight of steps. As Hilary stood before it, in unaccustomed London garb, the weight which had been pressing on his heart during the walk from Jermyn Street settled more heavily. His visit to Wynne's chambers had not been encouraging. The valet had been offhand, even supercilious, evidently regarding him as a person of little consequence. His clothes, Hilary had been acutely conscious, had failed to meet with his approval.

Now the stately calm of the commodious building in front of him helped his imagination to further depressing efforts in picturing the man he was to meet. While he stood hesitating, several men passed up and down the steps with the easy air of habitués. They did not appear necessarily to belong to the class of the languid rich; their faces were intellectual, their expressions interested. Yet he slightly resented their well turned out appearance and their tranquil manner; he could not have said why. Twice he walked back and forth in front of the Club windows, trying to import into his carriage the suggestion that his destination was by no means attained; twice he felt in his pocket to make

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sure that the deed was safe. Then he took his courage in his hands and mounted the steps.

The porter told him that he thought Mr. Wynne was in the Club, and left him seated in the hall while he sent to make inquiries. Hilary again felt to see if the deed were safe, and wondered what was the exact purpose of each of the small offices he saw in the neighbourhood of the hall. Presently he noticed the boy who had gone on the porter's errand return; but nothing immediately happened. After a further interval, the porter left his box and told him casually that Mr. Wynne would come and see him.

All this time men were coming and going in an unceasing flow, chatting, parting, meeting, asking for letters, leaving instructions, always moving, always talking. He appeared to be the only one idle and the only one silent. He thought, as the minutes passed from five to ten, and from ten to fifteen, that his unemployed presence on the seat would become a matter of comment, but no one seemed to notice him. Each new face he conjectured as a possible Mr. Wynne, with springing hope or deeper depression, according as the individual approached or receded from his imagination's severest pictures.

The hands of the clock opposite him were moving slowly to the half-hour since his arrival, when a short flight of stairs at the inner end of the hall, which he had been persistently watching, became

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occupied by the descending figure of a man of substantial build, easy manner, and gracious countenance. He was accompanied by a second, and was talking as he passed to a third in the background. He was one of the type, well known to Hilary, who feel obliged to keep their personalities perpetually in evidence. There were a dozen men now in the hall, but his was the most conspicuous because the most insistent figure.

"But I can't do that to-day, you know," he was saying pleasantly to the man behind. "No, no, not to-day."

Then he came on with his companion. "Not at all, my dear fellow," Hilary heard him say; "I can settle that on the telephone in two minutes. Hansom, Franklin."

Two whistles, and a cab jingled immediately to the door.

The replies of the second man did not reach Hilary, but the other's voice was continuously audible. "We shan't have long to wait, then. . . . Yes, I'll remember that. . . . I shall meet you there. . . . Good-bye." He turned to the porter's box as his companion disappeared down the steps. "Someone to see me, did you say, Franklin?"

"Yes, sir. This is the gentleman."

"Mr. Thornton, yes," said Mr. Wynne in a friendly voice, reading from a card in his hand as Hilary rose. "Don't get up—don't get up."

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He waved him back upon the settee. "I'm sorry to have kept you waiting. Now, what can I do for you, Mr. Thornton?" He sat down beside him with just the faintest suggestion of condescension.

"My business is of a confidential nature," began Hilary, looking round at the busy hall. "If I could see you more privately —"

Mr. Wynne smiled indulgently, and a low, amused laugh rolled lightly off his lungs. "That remark speaks well for your morals," he said. "You have not yet learnt that you are most alone where people are most numerous. The denser the crowd, the greater the privacy. Yes, yes — the denser the crowd the greater the privacy. Make a note of that. Now let's come to the confidential matter."

Hilary put his hand in his pocket, and took out the deed. Wynne saw its endorsement: "*Mr. Randolph Wynne and Mrs. Randolph Wynne: Deed of Separation.*" That told him all he wanted to know, but he affected not to have seen it.

"No doubt you had our letter of Tuesday," said Hilary, "mentioning the purport of my visit?"

"Our letter," said Mr. Wynne, with the same friendly smile. "Now, are you a monarch or a newspaper?"

This rather upset Hilary. He had assumed that at least the object of his call would be appreciated, that the firm's letter would have struck some awe

into the mind of its recipient. However, he had his thunderbolt.

"I am here on behalf of Messrs. Cubitt and Wells," he announced.

"I know the name perfectly well," said Mr. Wynne politely. "It is quite familiar to me. But I get so many letters, and my memory is so shocking. You are not a wine-merchant, are you?" with twinkling suspicion.

"We are a firm of solicitors," said Hilary, with dignity.

"Yes, yes." Mr. Wynne began to laugh reminiscently to himself. "My wife has been making another little affair."

"She has consulted us with reference to the present conditions of her marriage."

"Yes, and you have advised her that her husband is quite without a sense of duty, that his behaviour is inexcusable, and that it would be well for her to put an end to such an anomalous state of things, and to enter into a formal deed of separation without delay?"

"We felt compelled to advise her," said Hilary, taking courage, "that your conduct as a husband laid no legal obligation upon her to maintain the nominal tie."

Mr. Wynne leaned back upon the commodious settee and crossed his legs. "Possibly you are not a married man, Mr.—Mr. Thornton?"

Hilary admitted that he was as yet a bachelor.

"That explains your somewhat pedantic tone. You may have noticed that those who interpret the marriage relation with the greatest severity are those who are not married?"

There had been a time when, at such a juncture, Hilary would have felt an itching to explain — what his interrogator knew perfectly well — that the views he was there to expound were not necessarily his own, but those of his firm, or, more precisely, of the law. But previous experience had shown him that to do so would be to deliver himself into the hands of his enemy as one self-convicted of insincerity. The interests of the firm's client and his own position as its servant were of superior practical importance to the nebulous stirrings of his mind. So submission to the necessity to submerge his individuality in stereotyped argument had become mechanical. Sometimes he felt he scarcely had an individuality. And in the immediate instance — though he felt himself coming somewhat under the influence of his easy, winning manner — the account he had heard from his chief of the connubial course pursued by the man before him, particularly of his persistent monetary extortions, disinclined him even to personal sympathy.

"Most of the married couples I know," he replied, "appear to take the same view. At least they live together quite amicably."

"Very possibly." Mr. Wynne was still leaning

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back comfortably. "You came from — where was it? — Hull — yes, Hull." He paused reflectively. "Now I married an exceptional woman, a woman engrossed in intellectual occupations, a woman possessing — shall we say? — the artistic temperament. The artistic temperament, you may have heard, is a difficult thing to live with?"

"I think I have," said Hilary, "but I hardly know what it implies."

"To live with perpetually," pursued Mr. Wynne. "But from perpetual cohabitation to a definite, final breach is a far cry. There are many possible, many mutually beneficial and mutually sustaining, stages between these extreme points." He suddenly sat up and looked at his watch. "Dear me, you must be an excellent listener. No doubt, you have noticed that nothing makes time fly like an excellent listener. I'm sorry to hurry you, but I am afraid I have an appointment at Chelsea at four. Can I offer you anything — a cigar, a cup of coffee?"

"Oh, thank you," said Hilary, a little flurried, "nothing, thank you. We have hardly got to business yet. I came here to obtain your signature to this document, which we had drawn up on Mrs. Wynne's instructions."

He had meant to lead up to it much more gradually, but the other's abrupt announcement had startled him.

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Mr. Wynne took the deed, glanced over it without interest, and handed it back to Hilary with a kindly, paternal smile.

"You have not read it," said the latter.

"Not this particular one," replied Mr. Wynne. "I have read some of its predecessors. If it is not an impertinent question, may I ask, Do lawyers charge by the amount of paper they use or by the completed transaction?"

"Our charges will not affect you," returned Hilary, with a flush of heat.

"Of course not. You mustn't take my nonsense seriously." He looked at Hilary with solicitous interest, as a man unaccustomed to, and slightly amused by, a crude display of emotion.

"Perhaps you will kindly look at it," said the young lawyer, passing it back to him. "There is a monetary clause in your favour."

Mr. Wynne showed a faint access of concern, and opened the paper. "Where is it?" he asked.

Hilary pointed it out to him.

For one moment, as he read, a flash of anger showed on his features. Then his low, indulgent laugh purred out. "It's this very illogicalness and lack of proportion in women," he said, "which makes us so fond of them. You would hardly suppose, reading that, that my wife had an income of some thousands a year."

"I think it's a generous allowance, in the circumstances," said Hilary, with nervous stringency.

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"My dear young man, you mustn't talk about the circumstances — please, please! Now, I have been very considerate with you."

"I can look after myself," retorted Hilary, growing more indignant. "If you don't take this, you mayn't get anything."

"Now, if you knew women as well as I do," returned Mr. Wynne, quite unmoved, "you would realize that that was an astonishingly foolish observation. They act on impulse, and then weep over their folly. You will go back to my wife tomorrow without my signature to this"—he tapped the deed—"this feminine vapour, and she will fall on your neck with gratitude for relieving her anxiety."

"Then you won't sign it?"

Hilary knew that he was losing his temper, and he knew that it was due solely to the other's imperturbability and his casual treatment of the affair and of himself.

"Oh dear, no!" The society man rose from the settee and put a cigar into his mouth.

"That is your final answer?"

Wynne had moved a few yards to the fireplace to get a match. Instead of doing so, he tore off a slip from the stiff paper of the deed, calmly rolled it into a spill, and lighted his cigar with it.

"That is my answer, Mr.—er"—he looked again at the card in his hand—"Thornton."

CHAPTER X

HILARY stood in the street outside the Junior National Club, dazed and miserable at the failure of his mission. He blamed himself bitterly. He felt that his conduct of the affair had been pusillanimous and lacking in subtlety. He had proved himself, perhaps, an ineffectual minister, not only of his firm, but of Mrs. Wynne.

He pictured himself entering Mr. Cubitt's office with the torn deed. That in itself would not be a pleasant task. It would be like a schoolboy taking a blotted exercise to his master. And, in the second place, he saw himself writing the necessary letter to the client:

“DEAR MADAM,

“We regret to inform you that our representative's interview with Mr. Wynne proved unsatisfactory —”

And so on. That to a woman for whose gifts and personality he had a profound admiration, who had seen him twice but scarcely recognised him as an individual, and whose acknowledgment he would gladly have won!

While he was still standing on the pavement, a hansom was whistled to the door of the Club. He

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watched it dully, centred in his dejecting thoughts and angry self-censure. He saw the cabman settle his rug about him and lift the reins as his fare came down the Club steps. His interest quickened a little when he saw that the latter was the man he had just left. Then he remembered that Wynne had said he had an immediate appointment in Chelsea. Hilary did not know much about London. He had a vague idea that Chelsea was more or less in the slums—at least, that it was well outside the fashionable radius. Why was he going there—this elegant, smoothly cultivated man-about-town?

He remembered suddenly the second part of his instructions. He was to observe Wynne, to inquire into his life. The hansom had now left the curb and was crossing the road. In a few moments it would be lost in the traffic. He crushed down his native caution and hesitancy, and hailed another.

“Follow that cab,” he said rather breathlessly to the driver, pointing to it. “Don’t get too near it, but keep it in sight, and when it stops, stop, too.”

He knew himself well enough to appreciate that he had done wisely—presuming the enterprise was to have any beneficial result—in acting on impulse. Had he given himself time to think, he had not the least doubt that he would still be on the pavement. He had read of pursuing hansomers in detective stories, and the business had always seemed to him to be rather exhilarating. But now

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that he was actually engaged in it, he felt he was behaving meanly. Worse than that, he felt he was bribing another man to behave meanly. He was beset by the fear that the cab in front would suddenly stop and retrace its course, and he would be forced to meet Wynne's accusing face, or that he would see his suspicious glance through the side-window at some sharp turning. When they reached quieter streets and the separate clatter of the two horses was distinguishable, the strain upon him became painfully acute. And, for fear of accentuating the meanness, he could not bring himself to push up the trap and tell his man to drive more slowly. He shrank back into a corner of his seat, and watched the number on the hansom ahead with tightened breath and tense muscles.

Unconscious of the cab in his wake or of Hilary's agitation, Wynne was enjoying his cigar as he was driven westward. From its scent, his cabman anticipated a handsome fare. He had a disagreeable task in front of him, but it did not affect his serenity. His philosophy of life was purely epicurean. Facts were nothing in themselves; they attained their value only from the way they were regarded. Most men, directed on his errand, would have been unhappy. Wynne was neither happy nor unhappy: he was merely composed.

The cab stopped at a plain red-brick block of flats. He threw away his cigar, nodded to the por-

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ter, and leisurely ascended the steps. Half-way up the long flight he stopped and pressed a bell. He was admitted by a maidservant and shown into a drawing-room tastefully disposed with well-chosen furniture obviously new. Evidently he was intimately acquainted with it. He turned over the books on a small table with the air of a man who had seen them before. He was disturbed by a sweep of skirts and the closing door.

"So you have come."

A woman had entered — a woman in appearance, but a girl in age. She was attractively but a little austere dressed; rather stately, almost disdainful, and intensely self-contained. People sometimes called her haughty, but they were wrong. Her attitude towards the world was quite impersonal. She was within herself, and therefore to some extent aloof, but there was no conscious suggestion of superiority in her regular and well-moulded features.

Such had been Pearl Swete-Evans; such, with the smallest droop of the feathers, was Pearl Carbis, the wife of Mark Carbis the priest, and the mistress of Randolph Wynne.

"You have made me very unhappy. It is unkind of you, Randolph."

He came forward and took her hands. "Yes, I have felt rather a brute, Pearl. How long is it? A week? Ten days? My case seems scarcely pleadable. But it has not been my fault. Unavoid-

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able things have come in the way, and troubles have arisen." He drew her closer and looked down at her. "Am I forgiven?"

"Oh, I don't know!"

"I see I am."

He bent his head and kissed her.

Pearl was satisfied — almost. But there was that quality in his manner — only vaguely felt by her, but unmistakable to an outsider — which showed a man in the presence of a woman he was tired of.

"You have other interests," she said: "I have only you. You forget, don't you?"

"No, I don't forget. But this is a world in which things don't always run as we wish them. I have some news — not altogether good. Don't look startled — you are looking so nice."

"Sit down and tell me," said Pearl, sitting herself.

He drew a chair beside her.

"Simply — my wife," he said.

"Oh — oh-h!" The little cry broke from her acutely, strung with stinging pain. "When I think of her — oh, I can't think of her!" She dropped her face into her hands and was silent.

After a few moments she lifted her head, again superficially calm, again unemotionally aloof. "She has found out?"

"I think not."

"Thank God! . . . Thank God!"

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"But there is something in the air," proceeded Wynne. "I have had a small experience to-day which suggests that a general rumour may have got to her ears."

"What sort of an experience?"

"Oh, the details are not important, and they wouldn't interest you; it is only the significance behind them that is of any account. Now, granting these rumours, the hard question propounded is, what ought A and B to do? You are A, and I am B."

"Nothing," said Pearl.

"That never takes a prize."

"It is inevitable some time."

"What is inevitable?"

"Discovery. Her knowledge. We can't avoid it indefinitely."

"And that's blind fatalism. Let us look at the thing as two human beings who have been provided with minds to work out our own courses. The ordinary demands of domestic wives are unadulterated childishness, which no one need consider; but there are some things they can hardly be expected to stand."

"Of course not; she would divorce you. It is horrible, but we shall have to face the plunge. And it will be better. However she may despise us, we shall have become honest. We shall have done with this crushing deceit, this awful falsity. I don't think any price can be too heavy to pay for

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the removal of that. I would rather see her scorn; I would rather be lying at her feet, and that she were pointing at me with contempt and pity and sorrow, than feel as I feel now."

"A few moments ago you were thanking God that she didn't know."

"Yes, I know; I feel like that — I can't help it — but I feel the other more."

"I don't think it need come to an open scandal," said Wynne calmly. "That would benefit nobody except the evening papers. But I think we shall have to modify existing arrangements if we are to keep our heads above water."

"How do you mean 'modify'?"

"Well, to change them, to make other dispositions."

"Move somewhere else? Leave England?"

"My dear girl, that would be an excellent way to promote a scandal, but not to avert one."

"I can't see any other possible change."

"Oh yes, you can. Don't be a little goose, Pearl. But for this incident this afternoon, we might have gone on very happily, just as we are, for —"

"For how long?" The question came sharply; there was a sudden startling change in the tone.

"Oh, for a long time."

"What *do* you mean?" Slowly she got up and stood and looked at him.

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Wynne rose too, and faced her imperturbably. "There is an end of all things," he said, "sooner or later."

The room went black about Pearl; she swayed and nearly fell; she felt Wynne's stretched-out arm, and pushed it off fiercely. Then slowly consciousness returned, and she saw him still standing calmly in front of her. And yet it was not the same consciousness; it was a queer new consciousness, in a queer new room, in which everything had changed, and in which she herself had changed most of all.

"You are going to desert me?"

Even her voice was unfamiliar; and suddenly Wynne appeared to be standing a long way off and to be very little. And his voice, when he spoke, sounded very little too.

"No, no — don't talk foolishly. We get so imbued with artificial notions taken from sensational books that we can only think in extremes. A little broadening of our friendship is not estrangement. We shall often meet, I hope, in the future and always be good friends; but it is obvious wisdom, even more for your sake than for mine, that nothing should be allowed to leak out about — about this." He looked round the pretty newly furnished drawing-room.

Pearl gazed at him dully — dazed, hardly comprehending. He was still unreal, still a little man, speaking in little words, a long way off. But her

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faculties were slowly returning, her spirit was filling, her natural hauteur was raising her head and holding it high.

He took a step towards her. "Come, you mustn't make mountains out of molehills. You are too young to understand the relative value of things."

"I understand that I was willing to give you my life — that I *have* given you my life — and that you are not coming to see me any more." The words came from her slowly, very clearly.

"That is a little melodramatic, Pearl," he said, with affectionate benevolence. "You should not take your ideas of life from Drury Lane. Most people go through that period, but in a very little time it will amuse you to remember that you ever considered yourself a tragedy queen." He walked across the room to her escritoire, sat down before it and took a cheque-book from his pocket. "I'm older than you, and I've passed the period," he continued, writing the date on a form. "I've dropped from the clouds long ago and come down to the dull ordinary level of the dull ordinary world. Now there are lots of outstanding little things that will have to be settled up, aren't there?"

"Randolph."

He looked round. Pearl was still standing in the centre of the room. She was controlling herself, but her bosom was moving.

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"Do you remember I said I had something to tell you — something I thought you would be glad to hear?"

He understood in a moment. "Oh!" he said. He appeared slightly discomposed — even abashed. Then, after a pause, he went on: "Well, that was a result to be expected, wasn't it, unless we were going to have an exceptional run of luck? It's rather unfortunate but it's no good being sentimental about it. Everything comes down to the same dull level by various processes. It must be bulked in the debit, and treated on the same footing as the other things." He turned back to the desk, and went on filling up the form.

"I won't take a halfpenny of your money; I would rather die."

Pearl had moved towards him; the spirit had blazed up in her, fierce, proud, fighting.

Wynne looked round again. "Jove, you're a fine woman!" he exclaimed suddenly. "I'm sorry I'm losing you."

"What do you suppose is to become of me?" Her voice now was cold, utterly disdainful.

"You are hardly in a condition to talk calmly about practical things," he replied. "But you ask for my advice, so I'll give it you. This experience has been immensely valuable to you. You needed it to expand your character, which was curled in a little shell of silliness and ignorance, and to fit you

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for the world. When you have had time to look round and realize your assets, you will find you are in a position to return to your husband."

Pearl had listened in rigid stillness, her head high, her face set. She stared at him, unbelieving. Then, as his deliberate meaning came home to her mind, she said slowly, without raising her voice, but with intense and virile distinctness: "You brute!"

Wynne quietly filled in the cheque and left it on the desk. "You will think differently when you are calmer," he said. Then he got up and held out both his hands. "Won't you say good-bye? We have been very happy; we have never had an ill word. It would be foolish of us to mar everything by a tiff now — now — at the very end."

He smiled at her with gentle entreaty. He knew the value of that smile.

But he had struck a blow which it could not salve. Pearl felt its influence even now, exquisitely. For a moment the impulse to throw herself into his arms, to beg, to beseech, to lower herself, humble herself, was urgently dominant. Then the reaction, carried on the wing of the poignant thought of his callous, easy tongue, of the blinding discovery of his shallowness and his cruelty, swept over her with a rush. She stood quite still, her lids partly fallen on her eyes.

"No . . . no." The words seemed to be impelled, by the force of imperative need, from a throat which had lost the faculty of speech, as a

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nightmare coerces powerless organs into use. She hardly knew that she had uttered them. Simply she felt that she could not bear him to touch her.

"Oh, Pearl!"

"No."

Wynne stood for a moment and looked at the white palm of his hand; which had been outstretched. Then he dropped it, with a little flick, and turned and walked out into the lobby.

Pearl took in that the room was empty. The empty room was an empty world. In that desolating realization she found her voice.

"You are absolutely going?"

He came back quickly.

"You *will* say good-bye?" The same winning, beseeching smile — the same outstretched hands.

"No." Again there was the imperative force, the desperate need to keep him away from her.

Then the outer door clanged.

CHAPTER XI

For a long time Pearl stood where Wynne had left her. She was stunned and could not think. She was simply conscious of a momentous change, of an irretrievable loss, a loss irretrievable because it had been brought about by the revelation of the baseness of her lover — of the man she had trusted, admired, been proud of, loved. The world contains nothing bitterer than the shattering of faith in a fellow-creature which has been absolute.

After a while — she did not know how long — she sat down, and, still with dry eyes and stanchèd emotion, began steadily and inexorably to review her position. In a few moments, it seemed to her, she had been flung amongst the lowest human strata, amongst the people least regarded and least established — a deserted woman and a prospective mother. Her lover had gone; and there was her money — the payment for her temporary caresses — on the desk. A sound — hardly a moan, hardly a cry — came from her lips. It was the deep complaint of an anguished and outraged spirit, directed not so much against Wynne as against herself, against destiny, against the combination of forces and circumstances which had driven her to so bitter a moment.

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Racked with pain, strung to the end of her capacity for enduring pain, she swayed to and fro in her chair, now moaning continuously. In the midst of it there came the sharp whirr of the door-bell. She lifted her head with a start, with a shock of sudden hope. It had been a trick perhaps, some way of testing her, trying her; he was not really like that, and he had come back. He had returned to reproach her for so completely accepting him at such a valuation, and to comfort her. Oh, how completely she *had* accepted him in the fictitious character! She had never doubted, never questioned. In a few minutes a man had appeared to dwindle into a little mouse, and she had not questioned.

She ran out into the lobby, intercepting the maid, and pulled open the door. On the mat stood a clean-shaven young man, whose face appeared a little strained and nervous. Pearl scarcely saw him. She only saw that it was not Wynne; that it had not been a trick, a test; that he had indeed gone down the steps for the last time, and that she was deserted in very fact, and more desolated for the momentary gleam of fallacious hope. Then she realized that the stranger was speaking, and that he was mentioning Wynne's name.

"I think you know Mr. Randolph Wynne?"

"Yes, yes," said Pearl quickly. "Have you come from him? Have you a message?"

"No" — he hesitated, evidently finding it diffi-

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cult to speak — "I am a solicitor, instructed by Mrs. Randolph Wynne."

Pearl immediately saw in this the incident influencing Wynne's change of attitude to which he had referred. It was the positive confirmation of the desertion, of which his failure to return had been the negative. Flung in one instant from the illusively founded revulsion in his favour to the fullest comprehension of his callous cruelty, she seized the immediate opportunity offered in a storm of revolted and contrite feeling.

"You have seen Mr. Wynne?"

"Yes, I have had an interview with him to-day."

"You may come in."

She led the way into the drawing-room and closed the door.

"I will tell you all you wish to know," she said steadily. "I have done Mrs. Wynne a terrible wrong; it is the only reparation I can make."

"Does that mean that the — the conditions you refer to have come to an end?"

"Yes — this afternoon."

Hilary hardly knew what to say. He could see that she was controlling deep agitation. To reply that he was sorry would be an impertinence and outside the province of the wife's legal representative. As always, he had to think what he must say as a professional machine and not as an individual.

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"Then you have already made some reparation," he answered, after a pause.

In the bitter rigour of the revolted sentiment and self-chastisement to which Pearl had come, she opened her mouth to correct the misapprehension suggested by the statement. But the words would not come. She could not lower herself to that last humiliation before this stranger.

Hilary spared her. "I don't think I need ask you any more questions," he said. "You have told me what I wished to know. Will this address find you for the present?"

"I cannot say."

He looked at her a little dubiously and with some concern.

"Will you tell me your name?"

"You can obtain it from the porter."

The interview was evidently an exacting strain on her. She was enduring it, it was plain, only by the force of rigidly exerted determination.

Hilary felt there must surely be many other things he ought to ask. But he could think of nothing at the moment, and the sight of her appealed to his manliness. Often he had been conscious of much the same feeling when sitting in court listening to a harsh and stringent cross-examination of a woman in distress; and he had half admired and half hated the counsel, even though his own, who, in the face of such suffering, could

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continue unabated the lash of his stinging questions.

"Thank you," he said. Then, almost suddenly, he turned and went quickly out of the room, stumbling a little.

He tried to close the flat-door softly, but it would not catch, so he was obliged to swing it home with a clang. A little dazed, a little bewildered, but curiously happy — so centred is the human atom in the success of its own enterprises — he went down the steps.

"What is the name of the lady who has the flat on the second floor, number sixty-three?" he asked the porter, when he got to the bottom.

With a gesture combining necessary respect with a suggestion of superior intelligence, the official silently extended his open palm in the direction of the board on the wall.

Hilary read the name — MRS. CARBIS.

CHAPTER XII

SOMEWHAT unusually, during her residences at West Drewton, Mrs. Randolph Wynne had a morning visitor. Mrs. Swete-Evans was shown into her study, large and aggressive, evidently labouring with extreme agitation. There was a certain truncular formation about her, irresistibly suggestive of an elephant; and when she was disturbed, particularly when she voiced some trenchant sentiment, her double chin was glaringly existent.

She waited until the door was closed, and then broke out, without preface:

"An infamous thing has happened. It is scarcely possible to believe it."

Deloraine had risen slowly. "Something about Pearl?" she said.

"She has picked up some lover," answered Mrs. Swete-Evans, in fulminating bass; "he has deserted her, and the consequences that usually follow are to be expected."

Deloraine's calm eyes filled with incredulous amazement and slow pain. The news was a terrible shock to her.

"Do sit down," she said mechanically.

She hardly saw her visitor. She was merely an instrument. Her thoughts were projected over her,

past her, to the stupefying intelligence she brought.

"How do you know this?" she asked at last.

"The girl has written herself — a letter full of useless sentimental penitence. No wonder my efforts to find her were fruitless! She had the best of reasons for hiding herself. I could not have believed that in any child of mine there could be such duplicity and such depravity."

When Mrs. Swete-Evans was moved she did not mince her words.

"Are you sure that you have understood her letter properly?" asked Deloraine slowly. "She was becoming more independent, and her view of life was expanding, but I could not have imagined this. It is often difficult to express things quite clearly. Don't you think that perhaps she may have meant something *less* than you have assumed?"

"There is not the least doubt about what is meant," returned Mrs. Swete-Evans severely.

"Does she say who is the man?"

"No; but it is clear that he is one who could not be expected to behave honourably, even if she were not married. He is evidently an arrant scoundrel. I don't know where she can have met him, unless —"

She did not finish the sentence.

"In the Riviera?"

"That visit certainly did nothing to improve the child."

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Deloraine walked once or twice up and down the long room, and then came and sat down near her visitor.

"I don't wish to escape such share of the blame as may be attributed to me," she said. "I acted, as I thought, for the best. It seems I acted wrongly. But," she added, "you must not forget that the main responsibility for what has occurred, both now and before, rests upon yourself."

"Upon *me!*" exclaimed Mrs. Swete-Evans, aghast, uttering the last word in her deepest note, with a full swell of her underchin.

"I attempted in a few months to correct a mistaken upbringing, which had resulted unhappily. The time was too short and the process too sudden. All this wine of human understanding, which should have been instilled into her gradually and slowly with her growth, poured all at once into a frame which had already reached its full capacity for response, has perhaps proved more than she could bear. I am at fault for not having appreciated that danger, but the charge of rendering her liable to it is a much graver one. Undoubtedly in your upbringing of Pearl, you entirely misunderstood your duty."

Deloraine spoke her thoughts as quietly as if she had been addressing a person indirectly concerned. They were thoughts which had long been in her mind to speak, and the comprehension of this new and calamitous outcome of Pearl's constricting train-

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ing brought them to utterance. Few of Mrs. Swete-Evans' acquaintances would have dared to beard her; no other, probably, could have done so without betraying tension. But Deloraine's values were justly proportioned. She saw in her visitor, not the consequential magnate of local appraisal, but a woman who made the domestic mistakes of a narrow judgment and environment, and who counted in the world not at all.

"No blame whatever attaches to me," retorted the latter, bringing the full pomp of vocal and visual dilation to support the dignity of her personality against the unaccustomed attack upon it. "Pearl was brought up with exemplary care, and guarded all her life from any breath or taint of evil. Not only her teachers, but her books, her companions, her amusements, were chosen by me with the strictest regard for her purity."

"That is precisely where I think you were to blame," said Deloraine. "As a girl's mind and body expands, her knowledge should be allowed to expand naturally with them. You made a mistake in closing her mind against all knowledge of life and of herself. When she went to Nice she had not realized her humanity; neither your upbringing nor her husband's wooing had shown it her. She was unarmoured at a very vulnerable point."

"I cannot agree with you," said Mrs. Swete-Evans decisively.

"If Pearl had been allowed to grow up naturally,"

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Deloraine proceeded calmly, "her marriage would not have been such a shock to her, and she would not have run away from her husband. I have seen very much of her since that time," she added, "and I think she may have talked to me more openly than she has talked to you, so you must forgive me if I seem to speak dogmatically."

"I must assume," said Mrs. Swete-Evans, with ponderous sarcasm, "that the measures you would advocate for the education of a young girl are such as you adopted at Nice. We are able to see how those have resulted," she concluded pungently.

"Ah, by that time the damage had been done! And even then, though I hoped for the best, I had a heavy fear that it might prove irremediable; not in the sense that has actually befallen, but because I was afraid that the shock of her marriage would leave her always, whatever happened, with some feeling of repulsion against her husband."

"I am sorry for Mark," said Mrs. Swete-Evans a little sententiously — "very sorry indeed. What I can do for him I shall. His career has been shattered."

"No, I don't think his career has been shattered," replied Deloraine; "but his life has been blighted. And unless he is very strong, he will find it hard to hold his standards unshaken by such an experience."

"I had no fault to find with Pearl's choice," proceeded the other in the same tone. "He is an admirable man, and would have been an admirable

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husband, though there were some points of observance on which I regretted the necessity to differ with him."

"He is a strange man," said Deloraine. "I admire him, too — as I admire all such selfless workers, in spite of their dogmatism. But he seems to have stamped out his humanity in the passion of self-government. He rather chills me; he is almost forbidding. One can very rarely get to his heart. I think he will shoulder this further affliction as an additional cross, and will let no one see how heavy it is."

"I am sorry for Mark," said Mrs. Swete-Evans again.

"We will leave him for the present," said Deloraine. "We have to consider the steps that must be taken to deal with the immediate problem. At least we have gained one point: we have her address."

"The steps that must be taken!" Mrs. Swete-Evans repeated the words in her profoundest note.

"Didn't you mean me to understand that Pearl was likely to be a mother?"

"Certainly." The truncular head was lifted slowly with dignified horror.

"Then clearly she needs help."

"I propose to take no steps whatever." The heavy fiat issued in unhesitating volume, grim, premeditated, final.

Deloraine paused and looked at her. She had

hardly expected such pitiless rigour, even from Pearl's mother.

"But surely you can't think of leaving her to her fate?"

"Her shameful behaviour is justly requited by any consequences that may follow."

"You know what that may entail?"

"For the future I cannot regard her as having any claim upon me."

"Your only daughter — your only child!" Deloraine bent a little closer. "Mrs. Swete-Evans, let me appeal to you; you have made mistakes, but you can make amends."

"I have made no mistakes."

"You pretend to be a Christian woman." Deloraine was deeply in earnest — concentrating all her force on the effort she was making. "Take the advice of your Vicar, of your Bishop."

"Inform those good men of this disgraceful occurrence!" The bass note rolled on the broad vowel. "I hope I may never be ashamed to hold up my head in the House of God."

The strident disharmony with the spirit of her religion had to be passed. The question at issue was too urgent, and the only hope lay in its personal bearing. "But her continued absence in itself will make gossip. You can't avoid it. They will suspect the truth — perhaps worse."

"There is *no* worse," said Mrs. Swete-Evans.

Again Deloraine paused.

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"Has Pearl any means?"

"None that I am aware of."

"And you refuse to give her a shelter?"

"She shall never pass my door again."

Deloraine rose and seated herself at her desk and drew her papers towards her — an action which most of her friends knew to be an indication that she considered an interview to be at an end.

"Then *I* shall," she said quietly.

CHAPTER XIII

"MR. THORNTON," said the butler.

After a few moments Deloraine looked up from her desk. "But I don't know any Mr. Thornton, Invers."

"He gives the name of a firm of solicitors, madam" — the butler looked at a card — "Messrs. Cubitt and Wells."

"Yes, yes — I remember." She collected two or three slips of paper and put them into a pigeon-hole, crushed two or three others in her hand and dropped them into a waste-paper basket. "I'll see him, Invers."

The room was long and low, warmly and handsomely furnished. Deloraine was seated at a large Sheraton bureau, placed at right angles with the wide window at the end farthest from the door. As Hilary entered she smiled hospitably.

"It is good of you to come and see me," she said. "I thought solicitors always expected their clients to do the visiting. Will you sit here?" She indicated a chair near her desk.

Hilary wished he had left his hat outside. After slight hesitation he placed it on a small table. Then he wished he had laid it on the floor beside his chair, out of view of his hostess. He was

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deeply conscious that a round bowler hat, on a polished table among silver trinkets, is not an ornamental object.

"I thought a visit would save several letters," he replied, "and I have a communication to make which I think you would prefer to receive by word of mouth."

"Yes?" said Deloraine, watching him closely.

"I am sorry that, in respect of the deed of separation, my journey to London was abortive."

"He thought the allowance was not large enough?"

"Well, I found it difficult to get him to realize that a serious position had been reached. His manner was offhand."

Deloraine smiled. "I know," she replied.

"I am afraid I sent you on rather a hopeless mission," she added. "I know what my husband is like. I hope you will not bear a grudge against me, Mr. Thornton?"

She smiled at him pleasantly and kindly, and Hilary felt curiously grateful to her. He was no longer an undetached unit. She was looking at him quite consciously, even sympathetically, as an individual being. In future he would be recognized in a room, perhaps even in the street, by Mrs. Randolph Wynne. The thought stirred his blood. She imbued him with some feeling which he could not analyze. It was not awe, and it was no longer

a numbing consciousness of inferiority; it was rather the simple instinctive perception of character. Nothing about her was designed for effect; her hair was simply dressed, her clothes quiet, her manner subdued. Yet he was strongly sensible that he was in the presence of a personality, of someone who had thought and felt and done, and who was capable of perception and sensation and achievement at a level which humanity as a whole could not reach. This impression was produced generally by the air of self-reliance which dwelt over her, and in particular by the vivid force of her dark eyes. They were not the eyes of an ordinary woman, and they were capable of wonderful subtilty of expression, changing in a moment from almost childish playfulness and tenderness to the fire of indignation or enthusiasm or conviction, or to a steady introspective glow. They always watched him with interest. If he said anything foolish, they did not lose the look of interest, but he knew that he was talking ineptly from the change in the quality of the look, and he got confused, lost his thread, stopped abruptly.

In the street, and also in the office, he had thought her cold — the effect, perhaps, of her pale complexion and dark hair, and of her reserved manner. Now he saw, or felt, that she was not cold, but repressed, and the knowledge thrilled him. If he had been asked to guess her age, he would probably

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have said about thirty, but he would not have been surprised to learn that his guess was wide of the mark on either side.

"I couldn't do that in any case," he found himself replying to her remark, rather with surprise at his boldness; "but my visit to London was not altogether futile. My subsequent inquiries proved that you would not be justified in making an allowance to Mr. Wynne."

Hilary felt more keenly even than he usually did the false impression he was obliged to convey through the unremitting necessity to put his remarks into prim professional phraseology.

Deloraine received the information quite calmly. "I am not surprised," she replied. "I almost expected it. We got on fairly well until my work began to be recognized, but then he became jealous. He didn't like to be spoken of as just my husband. But he is very foolish," she said, after a slight pause and in a sterner tone, "to do this."

"I don't know if you would think of taking proceedings for divorce?" asked Hilary.

"Is that reason sufficient?"

"Coupled with desertion."

"But is there desertion? He is quite willing to give me his society periodically."

"You could apply to the Court for an order for restitution of conjugal rights, and if he declined to obey it, that would constitute desertion."

"I don't think he would decline when he realized

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there was a serious issue; and how could I apply for such an order, knowing what you have told me?"

"It is merely a formal legal expedient," he said. "In any case, you can obtain a judicial separation."

"I can't decide at present. . . . Did you discover who the woman was?"

"Yes," replied Hilary; "her name is Mrs. Carbis."

Deloraine's eyes flamed and fixed on him with an intense, sustained glow that blazed through his gathering confidence and made him feel miserably conscious of himself.

"What is she like?" The words shot at him.

"I'm not very good at describing people," he replied, trying hard to speak in a tone of ease, "and I only saw her for a few minutes. She is young and — and dark, I think, and — and rather stately."

"Oh, the brute! the brute!"

It seemed to Hilary that she had completely forgotten his presence. She got up and walked to the end of the room and came back. And after a time his own blood began to pulse. This was beating life. He had got outside the office. He was stirring in the world of emotion and emotional strife, where the deep springs of human nature come into play. When he had seen the name on the board in the block of Chelsea flats, he had suspected who the Mrs. Carbis might be. Now he was sure of it.

"Tell me all you know," said Deloraine, now

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seated again, in a voice of pregnant calm. "He has deserted her?"

"Yes," replied Hilary, regaining his confidence with his firing interest in the human subject. "I think my visit to London may have had something to do with that. He had just left her when I called. She was naturally bitter. I think she would be willing to give evidence."

"Oh! oh!" cried Deloraine. "You — Have you no reservoirs of feeling? Have you no sympathy, tenderness, simple pity? Are you merely a machine? What does this office life make of men?"

"I'm very sorry," articulated Hilary, astonished and slightly mystified. "I didn't mean to say anything callous."

"This was a little friend, a protégée of mine. All her life she has known nothing of the world, been guarded from every roughness, supplied with every need. A year ago she was untroubled, filled with beautiful, unpractical ideals, *terribly* innocent. In the course of a few months, through a series of heart-rending mistakes, her husband has been lost to her, her mother has disowned her, her lover has deserted her, and now the identity of that lover has placed appalling obstacles in the way of the one person in the world who both could and would befriend her, and she is faced by the streets. And in the presence of a tragedy of that kind, you

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stoically say that you think she would be willing to give evidence."

The cold, cutting sarcasm struck to Hilary's marrow. Never in his life had he felt so utterly mean, so utterly little. Often had he grumbled in secret at his fate, often cried out against the hardship of the inflexible narrowness of his life, because of the restriction it placed on intellectual and human expansion. Never until now had it occurred to him that his persistent professional outlook was binding his soul in parchment.

Yet he was conscious that in some sense Deloraine was unjust. He was capable of feeling, and he did feel even in the present instance, though less poignantly than she because less intimately connected with the principals. But where he felt the truth and sting of her stricture, and where he saw the danger into which his unvarying commerce with the mere worldly crusts of men might be leading him, was in the perception of the automatic ease with which he was able to ignore his higher sensibilities and talk the stilted jargon of material interest.

In the sharp distress of this sudden view of himself, he forgot his shyness and the personality of his hearer and spoke naturally.

"I think I must be turning into a professional automaton," he said. "I have sympathies, but there is so little call upon them that I am afraid

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they may be getting a little rusty. It is the result of mixing continuously with people who are thinking only of their personal advantage and how they can get the better of someone else. I expect they have other ideas, but I don't see them. And I have no larger or more intimate life-interests to adjust the balance. And, of course, I remember that I am not here as a friend or acquaintance to sympathise, but as your lawyer to advise you."

Deloraine began to feel a little sorry for him, and to take a friendly interest in him. She saw into his life suddenly and clearly, and appreciated exactly what it was. She saw his day-by-day routine work; she saw his nights in his solitary lodgings, his walks to and from the office morning and evening — she knew he would know almost every slab of the pavement — and his daily lunches in the same restaurant with the same chance companions; and she saw the apparent hopelessness of his outlook, and his soul crying for something more. In such a life even this journey to West Drewton to see her would be an event. She was glad he had come. She looked up at the clock, and thought she would ask him to lunch.

It was never possible for her to treat anyone for long as a mere official. Human beings were so absorbingly interesting to her that she was impelled to strike soon for the individual natures of those with whom she came in contact. Her gardener, her chauffeur, the maids in her house, were not to

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her simply people who tended her flower-beds, and drove her car, and performed domestic duties. She knew them as men and women with separate seething entities as vital to themselves as was hers to herself. She found out their hopes and fears, their troubles and peculiar temptations and peculiar discontents, their ambitions and speculations, and essential characteristics. People to her either belonged to the mass unseparated, or they were living beings with warm blood and stirring souls.

"Yes, but be human," she said to Hilary, her eyes fixed upon him intently. "You can be a lawyer and still be human, can't you?"

"Some people say you can't," returned Hilary, smiling, and then had a hot feeling as he met her serious eyes that it was a trite and fatuous attempt at wit.

"What you have to guard against," she said, still observing him with the same look, "is the danger of becoming hard and materialized, so hard and materialized that you can't get back. You are not naturally so, but unless you see that you keep yourself always human, your environment — the deadly routine — will kill your individuality."

Hilary was almost startled by the swiftness and accuracy with which she reflected his own fears of a moment before, and at the same time he felt a thrill of gratitude to her for taking sufficient interest in him to analyze his detriments.

"I had just been thinking the same thing," he

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answered. "I mean, your first words about my callousness put the idea into my head. I hadn't thought before that I was likely to drift in that direction. And certainly, I have no excuse for taking a coldly professional tone to-day, because I, too, have some personal interest in this case."

"Why do you call it a 'case'?"

"I get into the habit of calling things cases."

"Don't call it a case again. It's not a case. That's a cheap little word. What is your personal interest?"

"I know Mr. Carbis. He lives in the same house with me."

"You know Mr. Carbis!" exclaimed Deloraine, again firing. "He is a friend of yours, and yet you could talk about Pearl giving evidence! You could coldly speak of the wife of your friend bearing terrible witness against herself in a public court!"

Again Hilary felt a flood of shame. This view of the matter had curiously failed to come home to him before. He had scarcely thought of it.

"Lawyers have to think more of their clients than of their friends," he said in exculpation, without feeling he was improving his personal case.

"I am glad I am not a lawyer, Mr. Thornton."

There was a short silence, and then she said in a different tone: "It is very curious you should be living in the same house as Mr. Carbis. I went to his rooms once."

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"Yes, I know," said Hilary. "I saw you."

"I didn't see you."

"I think you did, but you have forgotten."

"Where were you?"

"I was going out of the gate as you came in. You had come in a motor-car."

Deloraine knitted her brows for a moment. "I can't bring it back," she said, with a propitiating smile.

"Well, it would hardly be likely," said Hilary, who at least had no exaggerated view of his own importance.

"You see, I am a little handicapped. People often remember me when I can't remember them."

"Yes, of course; but I didn't know then who you were; I only learnt afterwards."

"Do you mean you would have remembered me just for myself, as a simple private person?"

"I am sure I should."

"That is the nicest thing that anyone has said to me for quite a long time," said Deloraine, with a delighted and delightful smile.

Hilary almost blushed. All the graveness had gone out of her: she was gentle and playful and very humanly attractive. Yet he had the feeling that if he presumed upon it, the gravity would return. He was learning something of a complex character. If he had been told, the day he saw her in the office, that she could look at anyone as she was looking at him now, he would have found it difficult

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to believe it. He remembered thinking on that day that, however admirable her powers of mind, her husband's conduct might not be inexplicable. Now it seemed to him that a man who was entitled to her closest intimacy and could deliberately dissociate from her, had no right to the respect, if even to the tolerance, of his fellows.

By this time she had made him feel so much at home, and he was finding it so pleasant to be able to talk humanly with someone who showed interest in him, that he had almost forgotten his errand and his professional capacity. He remembered it with a rush, and also that he was probably taking up her time. He jumped up sharply and grabbed his bowler hat. He was careful, however, to hold it behind him.

"I understand then," he said, going back to his old tone, "that you do not wish to take any further steps with regard to your husband?"

"Probably not — at any rate, not at present — but I can't decide on the spur of the moment. I should like you to come and see me again, after I have had time to think. What is to-day? Tuesday. Will you come on, say, Friday? I think I shall possibly want you to take some action on my behalf, but it will be in reference to Mrs. Carbis, and not to my own affairs."

Hilary tried as best he might to conceal his hat under his arm — he had taken an immense distaste

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to it — while he made a note in his memorandum-book.

“I am afraid I have occupied too much of your time,” he said. He wondered if she would give him her hand.

“You have missed the 12.40,” said Deloraine, looking at the clock, “and there is not another until 2.20. You must stay and have lunch with me, will you?”

CHAPTER XIV

AT lunch Hilary felt strange and rather nervous. The slight formality of the meal introduced a stiffening ingredient into the atmosphere. The low, rather gloomy, room, the spotless cloth with its silver and flowers, the butler moving unobtrusively behind their chairs and changing the plates, Deloraine's own quiet, cultured conversation, all combined to produce the pre-eminent consciousness that he was lunching with Mrs. Randolph Wynne, the great writer. The pleasantly spontaneous intercourse, the discussion of the rarely discussed subject of himself and his affairs with a woman who made him talk naturally, and who was easy to get on with and unusually sympathetic, had passed with the change of rooms. Now the talk was of things that moved in the world and the multitudinous interests of a woman of energy and action.

"Beside my books and my plays," she told him, "I am connected with the editorial work of two reviews. I am president of the Imperial Association of Feminine Workers, and interested in various capacities in three other similar societies and institutions, and I act as adviser and agent in England to two American periodicals. So you see I am quite busy."

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"You must be — very," said Hilary punctiliously. He was genuinely impressed by the scope of her undertakings, and felt acutely anxious to say the right thing. After a moment's pause, he added, as seeming the natural corollary: "No doubt you are interested in the extension of the franchise to women?"

Deloraine smiled. "No, I am not a suffragette, Mr. Thornton. There are provinces which are men's provinces, and there are provinces which are women's provinces, and there is a middle and very large province which is common to both. Queen Victoria said 'We women were not *made* for governing.' Though she had to govern, and governed well, she realized that women as a body are not more fit to govern a country than are men as a body to nurse the sick or rear children. But in that central large field men and women should meet in equal competition at equal wages. The avenues of effort which make for independence should be open impartially to all."

Hilary said, "Yes, I think so, too," and immediately felt that the remark was miserably feeble and unenterprising, and must inevitably reduce him in her estimation. Had he read Deloraine's views instead of hearing them spoken, he would have found it a simple matter to make some sensible rejoinder, even though he were in substantial agreement; and if he had not been in substantial agreement, he would have flared about his room with a

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mind seething to voice with opposing argument. But the environment and the personality of the speaker paralyzed his mental activity as it had done when he first entered the study.

Deloraine, however, had got upon a subject which interested her deeply in itself, and the precise quality of her hearer's comments did not strike her.

"We speak in international politics," she proceeded, "of spheres of influence. That is a term which can be applied very well to the parts which men and women have to play in the world. We should recognise one another's spheres, and respect them; but we should make the neutral zone between them a wide zone and unrestrictedly free of access. At present there are many capacities, quite legitimate to feminine activity, where women still suffer disabilities. It is said that they must apply all their energies to obtaining votes, in order to be in position to remove these disabilities; but that is a sophistry, for it is obviously a lighter task to urge existing machinery into motion than to set up new. In government I think men can be trusted to hold the balance fairly. It is not true that they make laws to suit themselves. They make mistakes, but the mistakes tell against men, or against the community as a whole, as often as they tell against women. And those measures which appear to deal harshly with our sex are usually concerned with

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woman's moral nature, and would probably have been equally harsh, or even harsher, had women themselves been on the governing body. Erring woman finds her hardest judges in her own sex. It is women who take the lead in visiting unequal condemnation for moral lapses, and it is that partial reproach which is reflected in legislation."

"You think the differentiated judgment is right?" asked Hilary, still somewhat primly, helping himself to salad from a dish which the butler handed him.

"No, I think it is wrong; but I don't blame men for it."

During his solitary evenings Hilary had frequently rehearsed in his mind conversation with some imaginary person, upon subjects more vital than those which formed his staple fare in interludes of work at the office or among his restaurant acquaintances. On such occasions he sustained the major argument, and the only function of his hypothetical opponent was to raise conventional objections to his line of reasoning, to which usually, but not quite always, he was ready with telling replies. Never had he conceived himself to be following the thread of the other's discourse with strained attention, as he was doing now, in order to be able to punctuate it with short remarks which should not sound quite futile. Deloraine was bringing home to him rather unpleasantly, as much by her easy

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eloquence and confident manner as by her actual words, the really limited compass of his knowledge and experience.

An hour after leaving her house he could not have said what he had eaten at lunch. He only remembered that he had seen almost continuously a pair of arresting eyes, and wondered at the amazingly virile personality which lay behind them.

When he had gone, Deloraine wrote a note to Carbis — the summons he had been awaiting so long. This he received the next morning.

“DEAR MR. CARBIS,” (it said)

“Can you come and see me to-morrow? If not, on the following day? Don’t build hopes on this. I am afraid that my news is not good.

“DELORAINE WYNNE.”

He went out by an afternoon train. Deloraine came to him in the drawing-room. Her manner was very quiet; its quietness was ominous. She sat down, and invited him to sit down briefly and in a low voice.

“I am going to give you a shock, Mr. Carbis,” she said. “I am more sorry than I can tell you. You allowed me to try to remedy your affairs, and my agency has resulted, I grieve to say, worse than unprofitably.”

“At least that can be through no fault of yours,” said Carbis. He was prepared for a blow, and his manner was no less restrained than it usually was,

but inwardly he was strung to a high state of tension. "Please tell me what has happened."

"Pearl has become involved with a man," replied Deloraine simply, "and he has deserted her."

Carbis sat and looked at her without speaking, without moving. This was an issue for which nothing had warned him.

"It seems impossible," he said at last. In spite of the repression he imposed upon himself, his voice showed something of the severity of the blow he had received.

"As you knew her, it *was* impossible. She has changed."

"Yes, you told me so — but not to this extent," he cried with a sudden force of pain, "not to the point of the revolutionizing of her whole nature, of her fundamental being!"

"It was almost as great a shock to me, almost as incredible," said Deloraine quietly. "My judgment was at fault. I ought to have remembered that when the normal expansion of anything has been artificially checked, it springs with more than normal force if the pressure is suddenly removed."

Carbis was again silent. As Deloraine watched him, her heart went out to him. Here was a man, suffering intensely, as she could see, feeling, as he must, that she was responsible, at least in an indirect and involuntary measure, for what had befallen, and yet who did not reproach her.

"Few men would not reproach me," she said to

him. "This has happened as the result of my taking Pearl to France. I feel that I am answerable for it, and you could justly say so."

"I acquiesced," said Carbis. "It would not be fair to blame you."

"That was under pressure, and not many men would acknowledge its relevance when they were suddenly faced by a trouble of this kind. I admire you very greatly. You don't mind me saying that?"

"Mind!" His voice was again repressed and level. "Are you sure quite that this is true?"

"I am afraid there is not room for any doubt. She has admitted it herself."

"Can you give me any particulars?"

"I know the man."

"She met him at Cannes?"

"Yes."

Carbis waited interrogatively.

"I will tell you if you wish it," said Deloraine. "It is very humiliating to me."

He did not press her; possibly she had said enough to give him some inkling of the truth.

"Where is she now?" he asked.

"In London."

"You know her address?"

"Yes."

Once more Carbis did not speak. He was sitting with his arms resting on his knees, and his chin on

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his hands. This time the silence lasted longer than before.

"I shall go and see her," he said at last.

Deloraine had been watching him. She thought his cogitations might bring him to this decision, and in face of it she saw that her duty was not yet finished. She had hoped to spare him, at least for the present, the final blow.

"I have not told you quite everything," she said.

"What else?"

Carbis looked up with a face whose drawn pain almost challenged the possibility of anything worse than he had heard.

"It is probable that Pearl will not escape from this intrigue without becoming a mother."

"Oh!"

From Carbis the little interjection carried a hundred times the poignancy it would have borne on many lips. The acuteness was given to it not so much by a consideration of the lasting practical evidence of her false step which his wife must bear, as by the hard clearness with which Deloraine's words stamped upon his mind the reality and the completeness of her deflection. He covered his face with his hands.

The mother heart in Deloraine was drawn impetuously to him by his silent suffering. She would have liked to have got up and laid her hands on him and soothed and comforted him. If it had been another man, she might have followed her impulse.

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But there was a chill in Carbis's unemotional reserve and dependence on himself which restrained her.

After several minutes he lifted his head again.

"Does Mrs. Swete-Evans know about this?" he asked steadily.

"Yes, it was she who told me."

"What action does she intend to take?"

"None."

"None?"

"She has acted as it might have been expected she would act," said Deloraine, a little bitterly.

"Then Pearl is without means?"

"Quite, I am afraid."

"In that case," said Carbis, "there is no room for doubt. It is still my duty to go and see her. She cannot be left in London penniless. I can find her lodgings in the country. That will relieve her position with the neighbours and the people of the house. The future, beyond that, I can't think of yet."

"You are a good man and a very just one," said Deloraine, looking at him with the glow of her deep eyes which had left such a vivid impression on Hilary.

"Oh no, it is not that," said Carbis simply. "It is very easy to form a right judgment in crises of life if we follow the guidance that has been given. We have to think what another would have done in circumstances similar. In such a case as this there is no difficulty at all, for we have a record."

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"It may be easy to see, but it is not always easy to follow," said Deloraine.

Her own religious views were less dogmatic than those of any orthodox community, but this action of Carbis did nothing to decrease her respect for the ethics of the Christian faith.

She tore a slip of paper from a memorandum-book, wrote the address upon it, and gave it to him. "You are acting rightly and generously," she said, "but I am afraid you may find your task harder than you think. And I know, too, that you are not in a position to do much. Please don't mind me saying it. When Pearl left you, you voluntarily gave up the means through which you expected to provide a home for her. Her trouble is very real to me, almost as real as it is to you, and I feel in a great measure responsible for it. So I want you to promise that, whatever may be the result of your visit to her, you will come and see me again when you return?"

"Yes," said Carbis.

"When will you go?"

"To-morrow, if I can."

"That is Thursday; you will be back on Friday. Come and see me on Saturday?"

"Yes," he said again.

He got up, and she gave him her hand.

"If it interests you to know it," she said, "this afternoon you have crossed out several captious lines in my new book."

CHAPTER XV

CARBIS arrived at King's Cross at two o'clock and left his bag in the cloak-room. Then he accosted a stranger of amiable and intelligent appearance, and inquired politely if he could give him any information as to the quickest and cheapest method of reaching Chelsea. If he chanced to have time on his hands, there is nothing a Londoner likes more than to be asked to advise on the best means of travelling between two given points in the metropolis. Everyone has his pet route and his pet locomotive processes from everywhere to everywhere else. The man whom Carbis had addressed proved to have leisure to do justice to his opportunity. After a moment's thought he launched upon a sea of information; but as he warmed to his subject he became so prolix, sprinkled his remarks with such a wealth of parenthetical annotation, altered his first advice for the better so many times, and finally, in his anxiety to assure that Carbis should make no mistake, became so intricately precise in his detailed directions, that the latter had completely given up the attempt to follow him by the time he hurried away, repeating his last instructions and warmly disclaiming thanks.

Carbis applied to an official, and eventually took

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a Metropolitan train to Sloane Square Station and completed the journey by bus. He climbed the stairs of the block of flats to the second floor and firmly pressed the bell of No. 63. After an interval he pressed it again. He could hear it ringing inside, but his summons was not answered. A third ineffectual attempt convinced him that there was no one in the flat, and he returned slowly to the ground-floor.

"Does Mrs. Carbis still occupy No. 63?" he asked the porter.

"Yes," said the man; "but I think she's out at present. Lately she's generally gone out of an afternoon."

"But does she leave no one in the flat in her absence — no servant of any kind?"

"Not now," replied the porter; "she sent away her maid a week ago. There's a woman comes in of a morning sometimes. It's not a large flat."

"Could you let me into it, so that I can sit and wait for her return? I've come a long way to see her, and I know her very intimately."

The porter examined him critically. "Of course, I don't doubt but what it's as you say, sir," he answered; "but there's many comes about, some dressed in parson's clothes even —"

"Yes, you are quite right," interrupted Carbis. "I'll go for a walk and come back later."

He turned into the King's Road and passed half an hour walking up and down it, too engrossed by

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his own thoughts to notice the types of humanity that jostled him on the pavement, squalid and dirty the greater number of them, some laughing, some haggard, some slouching and dissolute, some hurrying with harassed faces, some stoical and careless, a class when seen from outside in bulk, but each absorbed in his separate little entity, and its affairs and vital fortunes, as completely as the Napoleons of the earth.

When he returned to the flats and again tried the bell of No. 63, there was still no response. This time he determined to remain where he was until his wife should return. In front of him were two doors, divided by an angle of the wall, numbered 63 and 64; behind him were the stairs, ascending and descending. The steps were of stone, and the little landing where he stood was stone-paved.

After a time his feet began to feel the strain of standing, so he sat down on the mat before Pearl's door. He took a little book from his pocket and read it. An hour passed. Occasional people, passing up and down, looked at him with slight curiosity, but he took no notice of them. Each time he looked up in the hope that it might be his wife, and each time returned to his book on seeing a stranger. Another hour passed, and still Pearl did not come. It was now half-past five.

Then, for the twentieth time, he heard footsteps coming up the stairs, and a slight trail of skirts. They came slowly, and, it seemed to him, rather

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wearily. Pearl had not been accustomed to walk in that way, but he felt sure it was she. The steps reached the first landing, and still continued ascending. As the climber turned up the last flight, Carbis rose from the mat, a tall, straight figure in black. Pearl started at the sight of a man thus suddenly revealed, and then, as she recognised him, stopped and drew into herself. And the action was not due solely, as he was immediately poignantly conscious, to humiliation and shame, though that was there, but to the involuntary shrinking from him which had entered into her since their marriage. It was impossible for him to avoid perceiving that he still repelled her, almost as some noisome reptile might have repelled her.

"I have been waiting for you more than two hours," he said quietly.

"Why have you come?" She was still standing on the flight of stairs, her face rather ill and worn, some packages in her arms.

"I heard you were in trouble."

"Oh!"

Deep contrition and pain and gratitude intoned the little word; and yet it was with evident reluctance that she mounted the last few steps to bring herself into nearer contact with him.

"It was good of you to come, but I wish you hadn't," she said. "Please don't talk to me about what has happened; I can't bear it."

"I don't want to talk to you about that at present.

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I want to talk to you about the future — the immediate future.”

“That is for me to face.”

She had taken out her latch-key to open the door, but he was standing partly in front of it, and she was afraid of touching him. Carbis perceived it with another acute twinge.

He stepped a little aside. “I want to see that you are not left in need.”

Again a strong wave of bitter compunction swelled over her. Yet she knew, even as it was beating upon her, bearing her down, that never until her last hour would she be able to bear the touch of this man.

She put the key into the lock and opened the door, struggling not to let it be apparent that she was fighting with repugnance of him.

“Please don’t come in here,” she said. “We will go outside.”

In that she was actuated by another and subtler sense, which had its origin in respect of him.

After depositing her parcels she came back to the landing and closed the door. They went down the steps together and out into the open. Neither spoke as they walked along the short sidestreet towards the river. When they reached the embankment, they found an empty seat and sat down upon it.

Pearl sat with her hands clasped on her knees, staring at the few crafts on the river.

"I feel how much it must have cost you to come and see me," she said, "and how much I owe you for doing so; but I cannot accept help from you. You must see how impossible it is."

"You need help?"

"Yes, I need it very much; but I cannot take it from you."

"I think it is your duty to take it," he replied, "if you are in want. I have only a limited ability, but I can save you from actual distress."

"If you knew how you humiliate me!" cried Pearl in a low voice, wringing her hands. "I couldn't, if I were starving. But I am not starving. The quarter's rent of the flat is paid, and to-day I have obtained a music pupil. I hope to obtain more."

"You are teaching music?"

"Yes; that is all I can do."

"But that cannot last. There must come a time—" He couldn't complete the sentence.

She turned her face tensely upon him, and drew back slowly and involuntarily into her corner of the seat.

"Mark!" The word came almost in a whisper.

"I know," said Carbis.

"And yet you came?"

"It was for that reason that I came."

"Oh, how good you are!" She covered her face with her gloved hands, and pressed them tight upon it.

"It will be better for you to go into the country," said Carbis. "I can arrange for some home for you. Afterwards, you can go on with your music-teaching, if you wish."

Pearl lifted her head. "Please go, Mark," she said suddenly, her eyes strained and wet, her voice quivering. "I'm riven with such a tumult of contrary feelings, and I can't bear it any longer. My mind tells me you are splendid. If I could feel for you as a wife should, I should be so grateful, so glad. I'd chasten myself for the rest of my life to regain what I've lost. But I can't feel like that, and I feel I never *shall* be able to feel like that. I thank you — I thank you so. But go! Oh, go!"

Again she covered her face.

Carbis did not move. "I don't want to distress you," he said, quite gently. "But won't you tell me what part of the country you would prefer? It mustn't be too far from town, because I have only to-morrow morning to arrange it; I must return to duty in the afternoon."

"But you *are* distressing me," cried Pearl, without looking at him. "By talking like that you are cutting me, lashing me, stinging me through and through. I can't accept it. I *can't!* Don't make me say it again. Oh, do spare me now!" She lifted her face to his, tense with the appeal of a driven animal turned.

Carbis hesitated. It tore his heart to leave her like this. But he could not force her to accept his

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aid; and his presence, too evidently, instead of alleviating, added to her suffering, and added to it keenly. "This you must agree to, or I can't go," he said. "If ever you should come to dire need — dire want — if ever you should be tempted — lower" — he spoke slowly — "you will send to me?"

"If I promise, will you go?"

"Yes."

"Then I promise."

He waited a moment and looked down at her. She was still sitting on the seat, her hands caught in front of her in a strained clasp, her eyes gazing over the river.

Then he bent his head and went.

CHAPTER XVI

AFTER his visit to Mrs. Wynne, Hilary returned home fermenting. He had touched actuality, he had touched vital force, he had touched drama, he had touched the vivid things that make the world hum. The office life seemed smaller than before, the office routine more constricting. Deloraine had infected him. He wanted to achieve something, to get hold of the cable of progress, to stamp his individuality upon the roll of people who emerge. He had felt from the beginning, it seemed to him now, that he was not born to live and die a non-entity. He remembered how there had always been an indistinct sense within him, even in his childhood, that he was different — that he had thoughts and emotions and aspirations which other children did not have. He had put it aside and tried to get on a level, and had never quite succeeded. Supposing — for the first time he looked at these strange movings, that had kept him apart, as an asset rather than as a deficit — supposing he were *meant* to emerge?

But he knew nothing; he was so inchoate; the stirrings within him were so vague and rough and nebulous; his brain, like his field, was bound by red tape. He must train his mind if he would win

his footing. But how train it in his narrow environment? And how utilize it, if trained? He could reap knowledge from books, but he could not reap it from life, which was truer and more informative than any books. Books were but another mind's reflections of life. What he wanted was liberty to turn the pages and gather the fruits of the great first book itself.

And then liberty to bring his acquirements, if he gained them, into play. How long would his work at the office be considered satisfactory if his whole being were devoted to some intellectual pursuit? There must be a long interregnum, he knew, even granting eventual success, when the office would be as indispensable to his material being as now. More than ever he chafed under the adamant restriction of his lot. If he could try his wings and find them insufficient, he felt he could be content — disappointed, disillusioned, but, in a sense, content. But not to be able to try!

All these fierce yearnings, these batterings on his cage, were inextricably mingled with Deloraine's personality. More and more he saw her deep gaze. He saw it in the day and in his sleep. It was not the ordinary look of the ordinary person, politely attentive. She was a consummate actress, or she was interested in him. He did not believe she was an actress. This great writer, great thinker, the favourite of an adulatory world, had come near enough to him to be interested in him. She would

not forget him — Mrs. Randolph Wynne! — he was stamped as a distinct and pregnant figure on her mind. It thrilled him, it caught him up in the midst of quiet moments and tossed him excitedly up and down his room. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and he would see her again! What if he failed to keep what he had gained? — he was such an ass in the presence of anyone exceptional — what if he dispersed the impression he had made? What if she decided that, after all, he was simply a country clerk, plodding industriously in his place?

But before Friday he received a note from her asking him to postpone his visit until Monday. It was sent to the office, but addressed to him personally, and not to the firm. He had a struggle as to his disposal of it. An autograph letter from a celebrity to himself was difficult to forego. Eventually, however, he filed it among the office letters. It was a business communication connected with the firm's affairs, and it was required to authenticate the change of date for his absence. But his pain at parting with it was softened a little by the knowledge that the partners would see that their distinguished client addressed him as "Dear Mr. Thornton." And his formal reply, which was duly copied in the book, began "Dear Mrs. Wynne," and was signed "Hilary Thornton." The next day he sent for the letter-book for no other purpose than to note the effect of it.

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He spent much of Sunday in rehearsing conjectural interviews. He pictured her animated and eloquent, he pictured her cold and grave and earnest, he pictured her tender and feminine and winning. And he saw himself saying the right thing, and saying it brilliantly, so that she was struck and arrested; and he saw himself saying the wrong thing, and saying it with fatuous lameness. But always her intent gaze was fixed upon him; only its expression changed.

That expression haunted him. He wanted to keep it always mirroring intellectual approval, if not agreement. When he took his seat in the train, he was strung with the determination to be true to himself, the self of his solitary musings, to prove his latent capacity and sensibility. The rigorous purpose evaporated a little as he stood on her doorstep and heard his ring resounding with a louder and more continuous peal than he had intended. And when he was shown into her study and saw her calm and subdued, much like ordinary women, it disappeared altogether, and his professional manner reasserted itself instinctively, almost defensively.

"I asked you to postpone coming," she said, "because Mr. Carbis was going to London to see his wife, and I wanted to know the result of his visit before I saw you."

"Yes?" said Hilary precisely, and waited with

careful attention, just as he would have spoken and waited if he had been receiving instructions for a will from a prosperous tradesman.

"He found her very much driven and harassed, poor thing, as I expected, but unwilling to accept the least assistance from him."

"Yes?" said Hilary again, with the slight respectful interrogative.

It struck him, with a flush, that he ought never to have signed the letter with his own name. Probably she resented it. She was dealing with a highly reputed firm of solicitors, and not with their managing clerk.

"So, you see, we have come to a difficult corner," Deloraine continued. "It is unthinkable that, in such circumstances, she can be left without support of any kind or dependent on her own inexperienced hands. But her mother is inflexible, her husband's aid she declines, and I am debarred, for obvious reasons, from directly befriending her."

"Clearly," said Hilary, leaning a little forward in his chair.

"Yes, but have you nothing to say?" cried Deloraine suddenly. "Why do you answer me so formally? You promised, the last time you were here, that you would be human."

"I'm very sorry," he stammered, flushing. "I didn't know — it seemed scarcely — I thought perhaps you would have forgotten."

"No I haven't forgotten," she replied, smiling.

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"I want your help this afternoon as a sympathetic and intelligent human being more than as a solicitor."

She moved from her desk and came and sat near him, still holding in her hands a writing-pad and pencil which she had been using when he came in. "I want you to co-operate with me in a subterfuge for providing Pearl with some present means."

The blood ran quicker in Hilary's veins. "Willingly," he replied, trying to keep the note of elation out of his voice. Probably it was some trifling thing; he must not inflate fantastic hopes.

"Perhaps I ought to have said a pious deception rather than a subterfuge," Deloraine proceeded, "for it amounts to that. Pearl knows you as the representative of a firm of solicitors; so I want you to go to her as if on behalf of her mother, and to say that, although she cannot consent to receive her again — that is unfortunately true — she wishes her to be provided for while she is in need."

Hilary hesitated, and his face fell. "I will try," he answered. "But I am rather afraid Cubitt's won't undertake it. They are great sticklers."

"I don't ask Cubitt's to undertake it," Deloraine returned, with a rise in her voice. "I never thought of asking them. I ask you — you, my friend Mr. Thornton."

"Oh!" Hilary gasped with startled gratification. Her friend Mr. Thornton!

"I offer you no fee — only your expenses to Lon-

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don. You can go on Saturday and return by Sunday evening. Here you have a chance of proving your humanity," she said, in a vivid tone that was a mixture of chaff and earnest entreaty. "Will you consent?"

"I not only consent," replied Hilary, who had recovered from his surprise, and was warming to his genuine self, as he had done at the first interview, under the influence of her natural manner, "I consent with pride and pleasure and enthusiasm."

"Well done! I am so glad it was not all superficial," she added, with an approving smile; "almost as glad for that as for the fact that you will go."

She tapped the writing-pad with her pencil for a few moments in silence. Hilary wondered if he ought to consider the interview at an end. He felt, however, from her appearance and attitude, that she had still something to say; and presently she went on speaking with a slight change of voice.

"Perhaps it has occurred to you," she said, "that I am treating my personal connection in this trouble rather callously. My husband and I have lived practically separate lives for so long, and his outlooks and habits and sympathies are so different from mine, that it is impossible for me to feel I have sustained a loss. My pride is a little hurt, but that is all."

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"He must have been mad!" said Hilary, becoming amazingly personal on a flood of sudden wrath.

She took no notice of the remark, and in a moment he was seething hot with distracted recollection of it, incredulous that its utterance could have been contemplated by his mind, far less effected by his lips. She would think that, because she had called him her friend Mr. Thornton, he imagined he could say anything.

"I should like Mr. Cubitt to write and tell him that I am aware of what has taken place," Deloraine proceeded calmly, "and that all communication between us must now be at an end. I think he will be sensible enough to accept that intimation, and will not force me to legal process. I have always felt that the failure between us was in part chargeable to me, and that I continued to owe him something in spite of it, because the society of a wife wedded to intellectual pursuits could not be very satisfying to a man of his light tastes and restless habits. I might have forgiven him a simple act of infidelity, but I cannot forgive him the breach of confidence I placed in him. Henceforth the page of my marriage is turned."

"Completely?" asked Hilary.

She looked at him with the intent interest which she displayed when the essential man showed through the skin of the shy and commonplace functionary.

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"What are you trying to say?" she asked, in a kindly, inquisitive tone. "You may say it."

"I meant, would you consider yourself free to contract another alliance? I have never been able to decide from your books."

"Morally I should," replied Deloraine. "I can't conceive that there can be any moral law to deprive me of a natural right if I wish to exercise it. But for the members of a community to insist practically upon the right to unite without marriage I think would be a mistake. If you dispense with marriage or relax its bonds, I don't know how you are to navigate the social ship. Besides, it would weaken the ideal of chastity, which is necessary for good government and orderly living."

"Oh, chastity!" said Hilary.

"Have you anything to say against that, Mr. Thornton?"

CHAPTER XVII

DELORAINE, interested, animated, alert, looked at him with eyes which seemed to suggest that she expected intellectual entertainment. She was seated beside him in a low chair, still holding the writing-pad and pencil in her hands.

"Have you anything to say against that, Mr. Thornton?"

"Well, I always think," he answered, "that our notion of chastity is rather illogical."

"It is a very exquisite ideal."

"But don't you think people waste time, wandering after impossible ideals, that could be used to practical good?"

"It's no use," said Deloraine, "to attempt to work out a practical philosophy of life unless you have ideals."

She was treating him as an equal. He was moved, lifted; confidence came to him.

"Well, the absolute ideal of chastity is immaculateness, and that would bring the world to an end." Involuntarily he jumped from his seat, as he always did when a subject fired him, and, suddenly oblivious of his environment, poured out his thoughts as they rushed from his brain. "Our spurious chastity is merely a fetish set up by a man — fos-

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tered by man—to enable him to monopolize women: a staking out of a claim for the sole benefit of one individual.” He scarcely realized that he was putting some of the nebulous ferments of his mind into concrete form for the first time for himself as well as for her. “It isn’t even beautiful. If it meant immaculateness, I should say it was silly, I should say it was contrary to every natural law, but I should say it was beautiful. But it doesn’t mean that. It means the possessive pronoun. Mine! Mine! Mine! That is what chastity means.

Coming back sharply, as he finished, to cold consciousness of the circumstances, and particularly of the identity of the woman he was addressing, he dropped hastily into his chair, amazed at and slightly ashamed of his fervour.

Deloraine did not say anything for a time. Her gaze, during his outbreak, had not betrayed any astonishment—simply the same inquisitive watchfulness as at first. “Mr. Thornton—do you mind me saying it?—you interest me.”

He felt himself colour. “Do forgive me,” he said quickly; “I spoke suddenly, without thought; I don’t know what I was dreaming of. I—I forgot.”

“Forgot what? That I was a woman?” There was a hint of a smile in the eyes that were turned on him.

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"Yes, that; and also that you are Mrs. Randolph Wynne. It was fatuous of me to parade my ignorance."

"You are not ignorant, but you are crude; your ideas are out of focus. You are full of rough nuggets of truth which have yet to pass through the goldsmith's hands."

"But how am I to find a goldsmith?"

"You must read, and you must observe, and you must talk. What you said just now is the result of abstract speculation unbuttressed by a proper grasp of concrete forces, perhaps urged by some sting of personal grievance. I dare say you have many other ideas on social questions of the same kind, produced in the same way. You can't govern humanity by a simple perception of crude morality. If there were a thousand people in the world, instead of a thousand million, and all base passions were eliminated from them, your ideas would be quite sound."

"But why are they not sound in existing conditions?"

She put down her writing-pad and leaned her chin in her hands. "Don't you see that if it were not for the ideal of chastity—admitting its impracticability—the world would become a chaotic bed of ungoverned passion. We cannot attain the ideal, but we must live as near it as we can. So we have marriage."

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"I think we could live near the ideal," said Hilary, "without chaining ourselves to the principle of indissoluble ties."

"How?"

She looked across at him with simple, inquiring interest. It was a new experience to Hilary to meet a woman who could discuss a question of this kind on a calm, intellectual basis, without self-consciousness or false modesty; and he found it a trifle difficult to adjust himself to the strange condition.

"Oh, I haven't gone so far," he said defensively, "as to think out the practical detail of a social régime that would dispense with immutable contracts, but I think the note that would have to be made to dominate would be temperance. People should not make idols of their human claims, but it should not be possible for their emotions to be starved. Temperance connotes self-abnegation, endeavour, responsibility."

"Even if you could assure it, it wouldn't be sufficient. You forget that, besides the physical claim, there are the claims of the mind and the claims of the soul. Those would not be satisfied unless there were a prospect of permanent union."

"Free unions might be permanent, but they would not be compulsorily so."

"That would not be the same thing. If you destroy the guarantee of continuance, you destroy what the soul rests in. But even if it were not

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so, you would still be faced by the practical difficulty."

"The children?"

Deloraine nodded.

Hilary was now thinking rapidly and talking easily. "I always think that that is rather overdone," he said. "We are not living in motley confusion, but under highly organized conditions. In these days of registration and tabulation, when men are precisely ear-marked for their rates and their Parliamentary votes, and, if necessary for their liability to military service, it shouldn't be difficult to make them responsible for their own children by some method less drastic than handcuffing them to the mothers."

"Oh, but you are so crude again," cried Deloraine, suddenly breaking forth on a flood of the bountiful human warmth that lay beneath the calm intellect of her exterior—"so crude and so cold. You treat intimate and exquisite family relations as mathematical nullities. You chalk your geometrical figures across the sublime fact of the home as callously as a professor demonstrating a proposition of Euclid. Oh, I don't know what to say to you. You are not a subject for cold argument. You must learn, you must feel, you must live."

"Well, you see," said Hilary a little pensively, "on that side perhaps I am short of data. My experience of the home has been rather limited."

The fire faded from her eyes, and their expres-

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sion softened. Hilary lost the writer, the virile thinker, the strenuous intellectual force, and saw only the woman, the great earth-mother, tender, consolatory, embosoming.

"Let me ask you some questions, may I? — personal questions?"

A foolish rush of emotion, started by a voice and a look he was not used to, for a moment embarrassed Hilary. But he drove it back before it reached his eyes.

"It is very kind of you to wish to," he said. "I can't remember when anyone did before."

"Perhaps you are one of a large family?"

"Yes," he replied.

"And you all had to be provided for, of course?"

"Yes," he said again.

"And so, whatever could be found for you to do, as you grew up, you had to put your hands to, quite apart from individual aptitude?"

"Yes," he replied once more, and this time added: "But it's rather wonderful how you know."

"Well, it's not a very uncommon set of circumstances," said Deloraine, with a kindly smile, "and I didn't think, from what I've seen of you, that you would choose a lawyer's office of your own free will. Do you know many people in Hull? It's not a very lively town, is it?"

"It's like most provincial towns, I think," said Hilary — "structurally and mechanically up to date. They're very proud of their improvements,

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and their new dock offices, and their electric cars. I know a few men — not many families — in fact, none intimately."

"It's not your native town?"

"Oh no."

"Will you come and see me sometimes?" she asked in the same quiet voice. "I mean, not as a lawyer — just pleasantly, and talk about yourself, and your ideas, and the world, and all the ways we all of us have of putting it right?"

"Oh, I daren't!" exclaimed Hilary, flushed by the unexpected invitation. "I should be ashamed to come and occupy your time."

"That's a stupid thing to say," she returned, with a shade of annoyance; "it's the first stupid thing you've said this afternoon. I want you to come. I like you," she said simply, "and I'm interested in you. You must read. Then we shall have something to talk about."

"I don't get much time for serious reading," said Hilary, with defensive prevarication, uncomfortably mindful of his empty book-shelves.

"What do you do at night?"

"Nothing very definite: read the paper and worry about office things."

"And do you set up for a philosopher on a foundation of the evening paper?" Again there was a gentle smile in her eyes — the smile which Hilary did not like, because it suggested a trivial view of him.

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"Oh, not only that," he said a little haughtily.

"What else? You need to read." Once more her expression changed. "There are these great big unwieldy masses of crude truth that are stirring within you. They must be moulded and cut and polished and fixed in their settings. Then they may become very valuable. Have you read Spencer? . . . Have you read Comte? . . . Have you read Haeckel? . . . Have you read anyone that counts?"

Each time Hilary shook his head. "I'm not very keen on taking the reversion of other people's ideas," he said, with the feeling that he was providing an excuse for his laziness rather than expressing a genuine sentiment.

"You needn't take the reversion of their ideas," she retorted almost impatiently; "but you must get to know what the ideas are that are forces in the world, otherwise you will always be disproportionate. Until you have read three heavy volumes about beetles, you don't realize that beetles matter; you don't grasp that there is enough in beetles to fill the whole lives of some men. You may not agree with one word the writer says, but you know that beetles are a science, and by that knowledge your own pet subject takes up a smaller space."

"I don't think I have a pet subject," said Hilary.

"I should say it was sociology — perhaps moral philosophy; that's a little wider. At any rate, I

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think it is one which you could take up usefully. Will you let me put you through a course of reading suggested by what you have said this afternoon?"

Hilary hesitated. He did not much want to give up his spare time to laborious study. He had got used to his idle evenings and to his vague, meandering thoughts and irresponsible speculations. In his position it seemed scarcely worth while to tackle seriously a wide field of abstract thought and knowledge. He did not realize then — as he came to do in after-years — that during these moments of hesitation he was standing at a point in his life where the road parted. Fortune knocks once at every man's door. It was knocking at Hilary's now.

But, though he did not appreciate the far-reaching importance of his present decision, he saw the immediate effect it would have. If he showed himself afraid of the mill, he could not expect the closer sympathy and acquaintance which Deloraine offered him. She would see in him — perhaps rightly — a poor thing. Already the prospect which she had held out had taken so close a grip of him that he was loath to contemplate his old life without the vivifying interludes which her personality could provide. It was worth some effort to keep such a friendship. After a short battle, he determined that he would make himself work.

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"Yes," he answered; "and I promise to be a conscientious student. But don't make it too long," he appealed, with a propitiatory smile.

"Then first," she said, "go home and read Westermarck's 'History of Human Marriage.' That will give you a general view of what you have in hand. Afterwards you can attack the philosophers one by one. Begin at the beginning" — she was smiling a little now — "try Marcus Aurelius as a *hors d'œuvre*."

"That's not the beginning," said Hilary, anxious to prove that he knew at least something.

"No; but you shall be excused Plato."

"What about the other Greek philosophers?" He was busily exhuming the remnants of classical knowledge which had resisted decay since his schooldays. "There was Epicurus. He said that the way to make a man happy was to take away from him his desires. That would solve the question we have been talking about and save me reading all the rest. I think it's very true."

"It's very Epicurean: it would destroy ambition and make the world a stagnant bath of indolence."

"Very well," said Hilary, getting up; "then I'll start on Westermarck."

Deloraine rose and came with him to the door. He accepted it with strange complacency. As he took her hand he looked into her eyes more directly and levelly than he had done before.

"Some time," he said, assuming a continuance

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of friendship with a confidence which afterwards astonished him, "I shall make you realize that I was right in what I said about marriage."

She smiled curiously — a little indulgently, but without displeasure — and turned back into the house.

CHAPTER XVIII

HILARY faithfully kept his promise: he obtained the books he needed, and for many months turned his idle evenings into studious ones. And Deloraine, on her side, abided by the compact she had implicitly made: every Sunday he went out to West Drewton and discussed the product of his week's work and the reflections induced by it, and the hundred kindred topics continually springing up — all exquisitely vivifying and exhilarating to him whose human intercourse had so long been bounded by office-shop and surface gossip — returning by an evening train. On wet or cold days they remained indoors; on warmer ones they sat in the garden; sometimes they scoured the surrounding country in her car.

During these runs it happened occasionally — at hotels to which they went for tea, or in towns where they stopped for repairs or to visit the points of interest — that she was recognized; and then Hilary was thrilled by the share of the halo which fell upon him. The first time was in Beverly Minster. They were walking slowly down one of the side aisles when he heard her name uttered in a sudden, excited undertone. He turned and met the gaze of a well-dressed woman, which was immediately re-

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spectfully averted, and left him swelling with elaborate nonchalance. He looked again at Deloraine. Her calm face had not even flushed: she was trying to draw his attention to a piece of curious carving.

Now, on however lofty a plane of impersonality an intercourse between two people may begin, a long series of mutually interesting talks and of periods of quiet companionship must inevitably undermine it in a measure. There must supervene, by subtle degrees, if the principals are human, a warmer and more personal atmosphere. Hilary had been drawn to Deloraine in the first instance by admiration of her intellect and achievements, and by the generous, ungrudging homage which the small and obscure offers to the great and renowned. That was not lessened — indeed, it was increased with his knowledge of her — but as their intercourse grew, there fell over it, and even in front of it, a more intimate appreciation, which would have been paid to her just the same had she been a simple unit in the level ranks. He no longer thought of her as Mrs. Randolph Wynne, but as Deloraine; sometimes even — but this was in irresponsible, exalted moments when he was tramping his room just before he went to bed, and for which he blushed in the morning — as Rainey.

She herself had come across the gulf that divided the celebrity from the nonentity, and accepted the position of woman to man. That was when she

had not resented his final glance and his final words at the close of his second visit to her house; two little things which marked on his side — though he did not recognize it at the time — his first step towards the attitude of the consciously stronger to the consciously weaker, of man to woman.

He reaped the effect of these changes in the uplifting and invigorating of his spirit. Hitherto he had plodded colourlessly and without aim. The consciousness of Deloraine seemed to provide him both with background and aspiration. His office work was done with greater zest, almost with enjoyment, because of the serenity breathed into him by the knowledge of an interest in life. His journey to London to see Pearl Carbis, which in ordinary conditions would have been a tiresome and uncongenial business, became an enlivening dance. As he sat in the train the rhythm of the wheels sang persistently that he was on *her* errand, that he was the missionary of the great woman at whose chariot he had gazed in distant awe a few months before.

He had a difficult task with Pearl on that occasion, but eventually succeeded in inducing her to accept an allowance by the circumlocutory process which Deloraine had devised. All the time he talked to her he was marvelling inwardly at the behaviour of the man he had met at the Junior National Club. Here was correct beauty surely — the lines of her profile were arrestingly perfect — but

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where was the vital flame, the sudden new facet gleams of character, the sparkling depths, the quick inspirations, all the wonderful qualities he had discarded for it? Pearl, it seemed to him, was lifeless, simply statuesque. When she gave him her hand at parting, he felt that it would become him to drop a knee upon the carpet and touch the tips of her slender fingers with his lips. And he found it difficult to conceive that she could stir a man to any warmer wish.

During this time his general outlook upon the world was always subconsciously affected by the new ingredient in his life. Everything he saw was coloured by it. Sometimes after lunch he would walk down to the pier, and, leaning on the rail, gaze across the muddy water of the Humber to the Lincolnshire coast. Many times he had thought he would go over to that quiet, desolate-looking land and see what it was like; but he had never been. On clear days he could see at one point a building of some kind — a church or a barn — but generally the visible tract appeared like a wide, low desert, where no one lived. The shipping in the estuary which divided him from this mysterious country seemed never to change from day to day. The ugly, unwieldy cargo steamer, with several new, unpainted plates in its hull, like square patches on a tattered trouser, that he saw toiling up the channel to-day, might have been the ugly, unwieldy cargo steamer with unpainted plates in its hull that

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he saw toiling up the same path yesterday; the little tadpole of a tug, with its stolid funnel high up in its sturdy bows, cheerily dragging its disproportionate burden of three vessels each double its own size, seemed ever engaged on the same ceaseless task; the same hooters and the same sirens persistently blew.

Usually, while he stood at the rail, there would be one of the ferry-steamers at the pontoon below, embarking passengers. They came down slowly and, as it seemed to him, with a sort of patient resignation, by twos and threes, women almost all, and almost all with parcels. They seated themselves on the benches along the ship's rail, or with their backs to the central skylight, and stacked their parcels beside them with the same spiritless mien. They were going home to that drab land across the water. Home!

He thought, as he watched them, with a curious feeling of impersonal interest, what a depressing thing it would be if all the women in the world were like these. Yet they were pretty, many of them—the farmers' daughters and wives and the daughters and wives of local professional men, in their well-cut provincial gowns—they were not *gauche* or rough. He was not aware at first that he was looking at them—as he looked at all women at this time—in relation to Del-oraine. Then suddenly, in vivid consciousness,

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her calm, pale face and grave, dark eyes got among the people on the boat, and he saw that what was wrong with them was that they were ordinary — deadly ordinary. You knew what they would think, or pretend to think, on every subject under the sun; you knew how much emotion they would be capable of and how little, how much they would dare to show and how little; you knew the exact limit of their individuality, of their enterprise, of their imagination. They would revel in the pleasures of sense at a dance, swaying rapturously, with a man's arm about their waist and his face within touch of their naked shoulders, to the beat of moving music; and would be horrified by a play or a book which gave them a second-hand acquaintance with the vital play of the same emotions in the world. It would be impossible for them to surprise you. You could anticipate their attitude to a shade in any circumstances. There was no subtlety about them, no unfathomed potentialities. All their goods were in the shop-window, and they were the same as the goods in the next shop-window.

And as Hilary stood on the pier, thinking these things and watching the boat gradually filling, watching the last passengers dart across the gangway, and the slipped ropes tossed aboard, as the paddles churned the water, he realized, with a flash of converse intuition, that the supreme fascination of Deloraine's personality lay in the suggestion it

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conveyed of latent forces, in the perception of the live human sympathy beneath a cold exterior, of the pulsing blood beneath snow.

He waited till the boat had started on its devious course (to avoid the mud-banks) to the pier at New Holland, and then turned away. This was Friday. To-morrow, he said to himself, he would take a ticket for New Holland. Whatever it might be like — and he had heard it was not lovely — he would pass a pleasant afternoon, because the day following would be Sunday.

However, the Saturday turned out to be wet, and he questioned if his optimism was sound enough to stand the strain of New Holland on a wet afternoon. So he did not go; and he never went. There he made a mistake. He had a chance of adding a rare specimen to the collection which all humanity makes of places visited. Everybody has been to Paris, but how many people in the world have been to New Holland?

It again rained on the Sunday, but Hilary went out to West Drewton. Deloraine told him that day that she was going to London during the week for the winter. It was no shock to him: he had known for some time that she intended spending the winter in London. It was now October. She promised to write.

"Once a month," she said in a contemplative tone, speaking rather to herself than to him.

"Once a *week*?" said Hilary sharply.

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"Yes, then, once a week, if I'm not too busy; I can't bind myself."

"No," said Hilary, quite humbly.

"I think, now," said Deloraine, "during this winter you may occasionally take a little rest from the books and try your hand at writing. But don't attempt to publish any articles — keep them till I come back. You've only one name — don't risk getting the wrong stamp on it by too great haste."

"I'll give you a few maxims," she went on. "Perhaps you will think they are obvious, but you will find they are worth remembering. First and foremost, be yourself; don't be scared into stilted diction by the shadow of the printing machine; write correctly, but simply and naturally. Use your information, but don't drag it in; don't force upon your readers that you've been poring over books. Avoid trite combinations of words, but if either will express your sense, use a short, commonplace word rather than a long, unusual one; only open the door to an exceptional word if there's nothing else for it. Never sacrifice your meaning upon the altar of verbal variation. Treat yourself hardly, be a cruel taskmaster; never be satisfied with less than your best; if a paragraph or a sentence defeats you at the moment, make a note and go back to it, but get it right, if it takes you hours. Only say things worth saying, but write so that everyone can understand; be lucid. That's almost the most important thing of all: people

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won't read you if you're not lucid. And don't be too dogmatic: be firm; don't show weakness — there is no more use for a pusillanimous writer than for a pusillanimous soldier — but respect other people's feelings and opinions. Well, there are a good many 'don'ts' there," Deloraine smiled. "I'll save your memory by summarizing them: Don't be stilted; don't be slovenly; don't be obscure; and one more big 'don't' — which is really comprised in the other three — don't be dull."

Hilary tried to follow this advice; and when Deloraine returned to West Drewton in April he had three articles to show her with fear and trembling. He would far rather have sent them to an unknown and unseen editor, because then he would not have had to watch his face while he read, and wait apprehensively for his comments. Probably Deloraine herself would have felt much the same had the positions been reversed. Few writers have reached so exalted a plane of egoism that the perusal of their manuscripts by another — however unimportant — in their presence, does not give them something of the feeling of a schoolboy whose exercise is being examined by a gowned and blue-pencilled pedagogue.

Deloraine said very little, however. She sent Hilary home with the general impression that he had not been quite fatuous — so removing the worst fears of his seasons of depression — but without the extravagant praise which in his stormily ex-

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hilarated moments he had hoped for. He had somewhat of an injured feeling that, considering his hard work had been undertaken entirely at her instigation, she might have been more encouraging and appreciative of his efforts. She had kept two of the articles. He thought she was going to alter them. But a few weeks later she showed him one of them in a weekly review, and presented him with a cheque.

"It would never have got in, if you hadn't sent it," said Hilary, sitting fiercely on his glee.

"It might not have been read," said Deloraine, "by anyone in authority. I think it would have got in if it had been read."

That was all she said. He longed for the satisfying joy of her warm applause, but she withheld it. He was disappointed and a little hipped. If a London paper of standing printed his work, it must have something in it; so why couldn't she give him the words of gratified praise she must know he would love to have? Could it be possible that she was jealous? — with all her rewards — jealous of the poor little first-fruits of his pen?

It was an unworthy thought, but Hilary was given to unworthy thoughts at times. It came to him as he was walking from the station to his rooms, and for a few moments a wave almost of bitterness, mingled with acute self-sympathy, bore through him, carrying him faster along the pavement. He quelled the gust of emotion quickly —

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his allegiance to Deloraine was too deep to be really assailable — and before he slept that night he had picked a conjectural way to the zone of the true explanation of her attitude. Deloraine was not jealous — she had his success earnestly at heart — but she knew that more young writers have been injured by an early attack of *tête montée* than by any other literary malady.

From that time Hilary contributed more frequently to the press, and as his manuscripts were never sent in without first being seen by Deloraine, and sometimes not until after revision suggested by her, and as his equipment, inherent and acquired, was undoubtedly sound, he came gradually to be known and appreciated by various journals as a man who had something to say and a right way of saying it. Long ere this he had confided to Deloraine — indeed, she would have known without his confidence — that his work at Cubitt's was uncongenial, and that he would be willing to exchange his position there for any substantial one which offered him freer scope and showed a more open future.

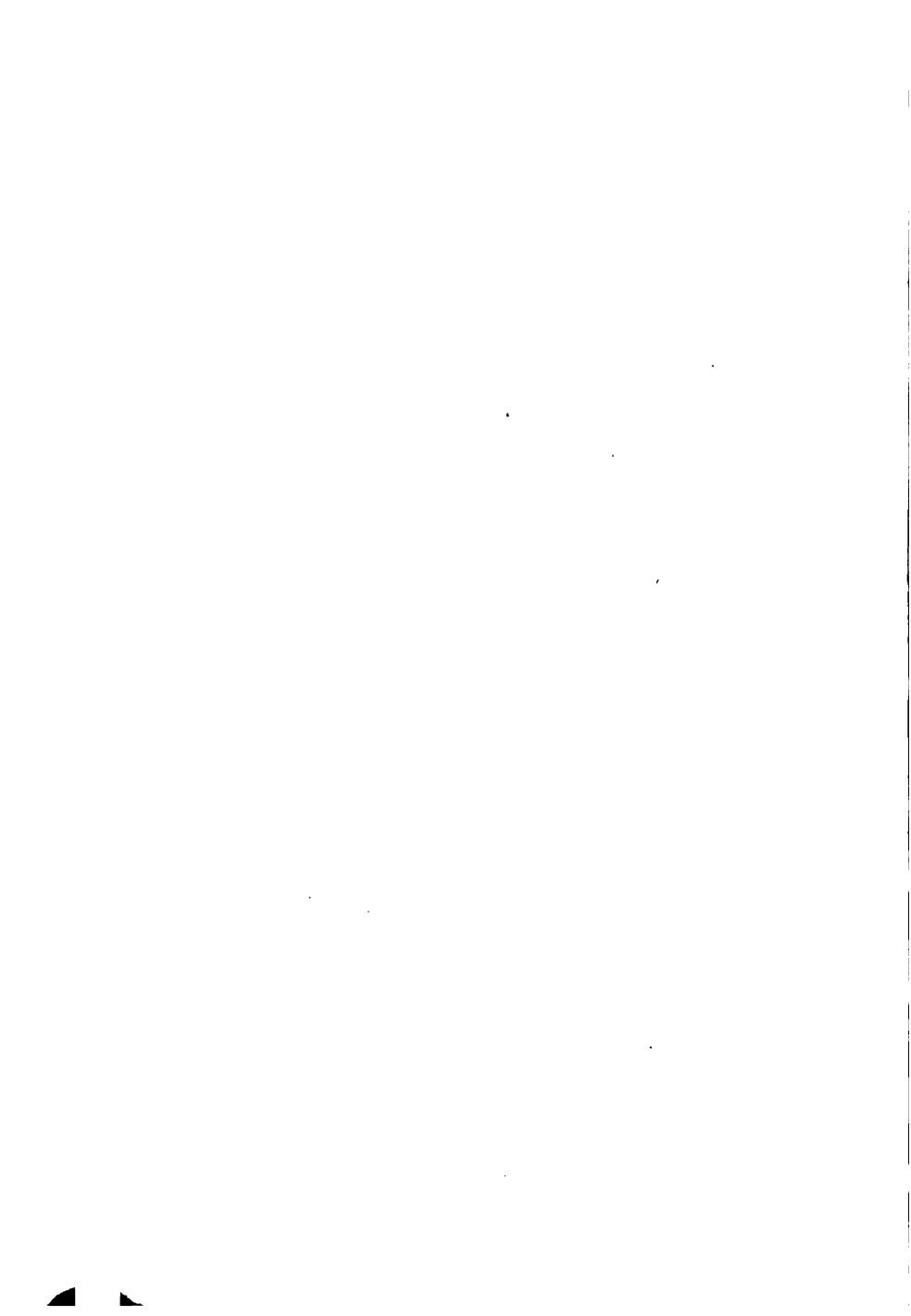
One morning in December, after she had again moved to London, he received a telegram from her as he was finishing breakfast:

“Will you accept appointment on *Daily Mercury*? Two hundred a year, with prospect of increase if you get hold. Wire reply.”

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By this time his work at the office had begun to suffer a little from his absorption in outside interests. It had not been possible to burn the candle at both ends. He had learnt through circuitous channels, and even by hints from the partners themselves, that he was no longer in favour, and for several weeks had been beset by the fear that only an adequate excuse might be needed to bring about his dismissal. He would have had little doubt, therefore, about his acceptance of the offer now made him, even if his personal inclinations had not vigorously, enthusiastically, prompted him to it. He sent back his reply by the boy who had brought the telegram:

“Gratefully yes.”



PART II

CHAPTER I

ANOTHER winter, another December — a year almost to a day since Hilary received his momentous telegram.

Deloraine was giving one of her evening receptions at her house in Pont Street. Her rooms on these evenings were always well filled. It was a distinction to be bidden, and few declined the coveted compliment. The guests included not only literary and artistic people, but workers in almost every field of intellectual effort, and many who had gained her friendship for their personal qualities alone. Writers, painters, musicians, men of science, politicians, with their wives and daughters, a brilliant effect of shimmering silks and fair shoulders and sparkling jewels, amid masculine uniformity, thronged the rooms streaming with light, and overflowed upon the staircases, their voices rising and falling and rising again in a ceaseless hum of talk.

About ten o'clock, when those in the drawing-room had temporarily hushed to listen to a singer, Hilary made his way slowly up the stairs, stopping from time to time to let women go by or to avoid

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the skirts of others in advance. He spoke to two or three people as he passed them. At the drawing-room door he waited among a little knot until the singer had ceased, and then entered in search of his hostess.

There was nothing strange or hesitating about him now, and no longer any provincial air. He was well dressed and carried himself easily. Though many of those in the room had made some mark in the world, and more than one were distinguished, he walked through them without sign of embarrassment. But he had not replaced his shyness by arrogance or priggishness: his was simply the quiet bearing of a man who felt firm in his footing and had no reason to fear comparison with others.

Since he came to London, Hilary's star had been steadily rising. His editor had discovered before many weeks had passed that he had on his staff an authority on social questions: a man whose pen was firm, and whose voice was unhalting because he *knew*. His copy never bore the stamp of a writer anxious to use the hasty fruits of an afternoon's cramming at the Museum. And since the editor was a man who made use of his assets, he availed himself of his new ally wherever there was opportunity for the employment of his special knowledge. Hilary wrote the leaders and reviewed the books on his subject; he attended lectures and meetings, and dipped a trenchant pen in the ink of the

only criticism that tells — the criticism that shows understanding. His salary had already been substantially augmented, and he now occupied two handsome rooms in Westminster. Deloraine had given up two afternoons to help him to choose the furniture. As he had stood in the midst of it, finally arranged and complete, in the first pride of ownership, he had marvelled exceedingly that he could have suffered Mrs. Cranford's oleographs and anti-macassars for four or five years, when all this was to be obtained at an outlay not to be counted beside the satisfaction of the visual sense.

Besides his work at the *Mercury* office, he contributed occasionally to the reviews and had already got to work on a book — the book which he was told every journalist started to write and never finished. Whether he finished his or not, he felt depended not a little, if not entirely, upon Deloraine. She had read the opening chapters of "Sex and Social Order" and passed them without criticism. If that attitude continued, he had no doubt that he could find determination to get through with it, strenuous as the work was; but he thought he could not persevere in the face of her adverse judgment, however kindly expressed. He did not expect her to agree with all his views, but he wanted the continual support of her passive assurance that he was writing with the dignity and authority which the subject demanded.

Deloraine was standing among a small group of

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people at the end of the room. She moved slightly away from them, as Hilary approached, and greeted him with a smile. Some women who were watching her detected, too, the faintest flush of colour to her cheeks. By this time the young journalist was tolerably well known in literary circles, and he had been seen tolerably often in Deloraine's company.

"I'm glad you've come," she said, with simple directness. "I had begun to think you didn't intend to. You are rather late."

"I didn't hurry," he replied in an intimate undertone. He was the only one of those who had been looking at her who hadn't noticed the slight flush. "I knew you couldn't possibly want an additional human unit to take up an additional square foot or two of space."

"Yes, but you are useful — I can send you errands. How do you think the party is prospering? Do they look happy?"

"Did you ever see anyone look happy at a function of this kind?"

"That's a trite and obvious thing to say," she retorted; "not at all clever. And it's rather unkind of you, because one does feel the responsibility and hope it will go off well. I want to be comforted."

She spoke superficially playfully, but with an under-quality of genuine reproach.

"I don't think I meant it," he said contritely, with the smile he had come to bestow on her at

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times, that always seemed to her like a mother-bird spreading its wings over her; which was rather impertinent on his part, perhaps, but which she secretly valued because it was one of the things she had forfeited in general, with the growth of her position. "I get into the habit of talking in that cheap way; I think it must come out of the comic papers."

"Never mind. Have you done anything to the book?"

"A few pages. I really haven't had time," he added defensively.

"I don't believe you."

She walked away calmly to talk to a woman whom she had just espied sitting by herself.

Left suddenly stranded, Hilary turned and took his bearings with rather an amused expression. A man spoke to him, and they talked for a few minutes. He didn't know Hilary's name, and Hilary didn't know his, and they were both suspicious the other might be some celebrity. Consequently their remarks were distinctly noncommittal. Then there was a movement near the piano: a 'cellist was going to play, and she was crossing the room to her instrument. Hilary took the opportunity of the new settlement which followed to retreat into a corner. He had never been an adept at making conversation for its own sake, and he darkly suspected that he was too selfish to persevere in its practice. By a piece of good fortune he found an unoccupied

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chair, and sat down in it. He rested his head on the back, clasped his hands one across the other, and gazed raptly at the top of the opposite wall while the 'cellist played. He was thinking, in fact, that the cornice was curiously wrought, and wishing that this condition of things might continue uninterruptedly.

"You are fond of music, Mr. Thornton?"

Hilary roused himself and sat up. The 'cellist had ceased. He recognized, sitting next him, and looking at him with a little seductive shyness, as though the remark had been hard to make, a girl he had met somewhere — he couldn't remember where — in the last few days.

"Well — to tell the truth — not very."

"You look quite absorbed."

"You see, it gives one a chance to think quietly."

He was conscious that her face was very pretty, and that she had a beautiful figure becomingly gowned. He wondered he hadn't noticed her more particularly when he had seen her before. But evening dress made such a difference to women.

"Oh, thinking's so dull. That's why I spoke to you. I can't bear to have nothing to do but just think."

"You were in a tight corner?" said Hilary, without showing the smile.

"I believe I've said something stupid. I can always tell from the way people look. Well, I

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don't care. I was going to say I like talking much better than thinking. Don't you?"

"Assuredly," said Hilary, dutifully supplying the obvious, "in present circumstances."

"And I think music's wasted," she went on, giving him a sweetly acknowledging smile, "unless you can dance to it. Don't you love dancing?"

"Well, I always seem to be a month or two out of date with my step," said Hilary, "so my enjoyment gets mixed up with other things."

"Oh, how can you laugh? You are missing the only really perfectly satisfying thing in life."

"I am not laughing. I assure you I appreciate the tragedy — it's a perverse fate that won't let me catch up."

"I should love to teach you. We shall have lots of opportunities, if Mrs. Wynne would play for us. Do you think she would?"

Hilary's tickled sense of the quaintness of the picture conjured up was checked by the reproaches of his memory. He was coming to the end of his resources. An ignominious admission seemed to be growing inevitable.

"You remember me, don't you?" she asked suddenly.

"Of course I do," he answered, with smiling mendacity.

"I'm Jean Mariner. That's for telling the fib so nicely."

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"But why should you consider it a fib? I couldn't forget you."

This last was said with an expressive inflection. She was one of those women who made men realize they were expected to flirt, and Hilary fell easily into the rôle assigned to him. He knew he had often before resisted a similar invitation, but this charming being, with her grace and softness and persuasive eyes, and her delicate folds of sheeny gauze, and her tender scent of tea-roses, satisfied his sense of feminine proportion and pulled at the male in him.

"I'm going to be Mrs. Wynne's secretary," she announced in a delightful tone of confidence. "Won't it be jolly?"

Hilary took a moment to assimilate the information. This was not his notion of a secretary. He knew Deloraine's present assistant was leaving, but he was far from prepared for such a successor.

"That's excellent news," he said, gliding over his astonishment.

"Do you think I shall be able to manage it?" — with a pretty pretence of nervousness.

"Of course you will," said Hilary unscrupulously.

"I feel rather uneasy about my spelling."

"Oh, nobody can spell," he answered in the same cheerful tone. He was perfectly conscious that he

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was flagrantly suiting his talk to her standard, and enjoying the process.

"Can't *you* spell?"

"No; I leave it to the compositor."

She did not quite accept this, but she passed it with a smile.

"You see," she told him, "I'm a distant relative of Mrs. Wynne's — I'm not quite sure what — some far-off cousin. I never can understand relationships — they're so muddling."

"They're not intended to be understood," said Hilary.

It occurred to him, even while he was lazily speaking, what a racking business it would be if one couldn't let things slide in this way — if one *had* to explain, *had* to make her understand. He knew that, after half an hour's careful instruction in this simple matter of removals in cousinship, she would say in the same cheerful, charming voice that it was "so muddling."

She laughed softly — a low, contented little ripple.

"You're saying that to be kind to me," she declared. "Somebody must understand relationships."

"Oh, well, specialists, genealogists. Every subject has its experts. Probably the ingredients of this lovely dress are nursery names to you, but it is all an enchanting mystery to me, and if you told

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me, I should be no wiser in five minutes. And I dare say Professor Wylie over there knows how to find the parallax of a star, but it makes my brain reel to think of it."

"I don't even know what that is," she said honestly.

"Neither do I; but I like to use long words. You won't tell Mrs. Wynne, will you?"

"She wouldn't believe me if I did," said the young lady cheerfully. "Of course, I've heard a great deal about you. You are the example I must follow if I am to get on in the world."

Hilary's pulse beat a little faster, and he flushed slightly with pleasure — not because she had heard of him, but because the information had been given. Jean privately thought that Deloraine had told her so much about Hilary because she believed he might make her a satisfactory husband, and she was looking at him now with that interpretation in her mind. She thought he was rather nice. He wasn't a bit clever, as she had feared — that is, he didn't obtrude his cleverness. He was human and comfortable, and easy to get on with, and said nice, interesting things. She hated clever men almost as much as she hated clever women — except Deloraine; but she was like Hilary — she didn't insist upon talking about woman's position in the world, and her soul, and the purpose of life, and things of that kind, and drag mental mountains out of every simple little action, such as poking the fire.

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"I hope it was all good?" asked Hilary, with the slightest note of constraint in his voice.

"Oh, that's not fair; I shan't tell you."

"No, it's not," he agreed. He saw Deloraine wanted to speak to him, and got up. "When may I come for my first dancing-lesson?"

"I shan't give you a dancing-lesson if you are going away." She pouted deliciously.

"That's exacting a penalty for a fact that is one in itself."

She smiled again. "I'll tell you," she said, "when I've had time to think out if that's an especially nice compliment."

CHAPTER II

DELORAINÉ came back to the drawing-room when the last of her guests had gone, drew a chair to the fire, and poked it into a blaze.

"Now we can talk," she said.

Hilary was still there, turning the pages of a library-book he had found lying on the table. He put it down, and came and sat beside her.

"Yes. What shall we talk about?"

He took out his cigarettes. "I can smoke here now?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, what shall we talk about?"

"Did you think it was a nice party?"

"Yes, as parties go."

"And did you think I looked nice?"

"Yes —" He hesitated.

"As *I* go? Oh, don't say it, Hilary."

"I hadn't the remotest intention of saying it. Good gracious! I was wondering if I could say what I really *did* think."

"Oh, what really did you think?"

She was candidly drawing him — looking at him with side-glance and tightened breath — joyously playing the transparent coquette; but he did not care.

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"I thought you were superb — infinitely the most attractive and compelling and most wonderfully vital woman present. You simply walked on all the rest — simply turned them into little ants."

She took a long breath deliberately. She had flushed a little. She was pleased. No woman can be quite unsusceptible to genuine, ardent admiration, however it may be expressed. It is the note of sincerity, rather than the extravagant words, which she hears, and to which she responds.

"That's an awful great deal to swallow all at once," she said. "It might produce emotional dyspepsia. I might get bad attacks of self-sufficiency and arrogance and other forms of acute egoism."

Hilary's only reply was a short laugh.

"What does that mean? Does it mean you wouldn't mind if I did?"

"No; but I know you." He laughed again with sudden amusement. "If that could happen, you would be dead by now, instead of being —"

"What?" This time the question was spoken softly and without pose.

"Just simple and sweet and natural and — and the best woman in the world."

He was looking into the fire. She turned her eyes and let them rest on his face. The pretence coquetry had gone from them. She scarcely knew what feeling they now expressed, what feeling it was of which for many months she had been stilly

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conscious. It seemed to her almost that she felt like a mother to this fervent, thoughtful, well-groomed being, whom she had brought to London and changed from a cramped and diffident lawyer's clerk to an assured and accomplished man. And the impulse of that feeling, she thought, was that she could always see the old character through the new, and appreciate the strenuous means which had gone to the building of the later traits. She knew as well as he knew himself that, spite of the assurance won from environment and worn firmly, his native reserve and self-distrust were not, and never could be, quite obliterated.

The silence lasted many minutes. Then Deloraine asked: "Did you like Jean Mariner?"

"I'm not quite sure," said Hilary, breaking his reverie and turning round. "She's awfully good-looking. She makes you feel—well, she makes you feel wicked." He threw the end of his cigarette into the fire.

"I'm going to have her for my secretary," Deloraine said. "I expect I'm rather foolish. But she's a distant relative, and very anxious to see London and to make a beginning as an independent woman."

"What relative exactly?" asked Hilary, struck with sudden curiosity, not for the information but for the answer.

"Her mother's father was my mother's cousin. That's rather intricate. She must be my second

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cousin once removed. It hardly amounts to a claim, does it? But I wanted a secretary, and she wanted to come."

"Of course she can't write shorthand?"

"Oh no."

"Nor type?"

"Oh, she'll soon pick that up."

"Nor do anything but take down slowly from dictation and want to go to plays and dances. How foolish you are!"

"Because she may want some amusement?" She asked the unnecessary question because she liked to hear him say what he was going to say, in the voice he was going to say it.

"No; for doing these generous, tender-hearted, costly things."

"Why do you say 'costly'?"

"They are always costly. You befriended Pearl Carbis, and look how she repaid you. You befriended me, and I've been a nuisance to you ever since. Now you are going to befriend this girl, and that will mean doing all your own typing and letter-writing for a month, and then an extra five-pound note, or some silly thing, to soothe her on the journey home."

He was not feeling very kindly towards Jean, because she had moved him by her beauty, and he hated being moved — animally moved. She had worn a gown unusually *décolleté* and he was resentfully conscious of it still.

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"I don't think women ought to wear low dresses," he said suddenly.

Deloraine drew a gauze shawl over her shoulders with an amused gesture; but Hilary said nothing.

"Why not?" she asked, laughing.

"It's not really playing the game."

"Oh, rubbish! Don't be a prig, Hilary."

"Yes, I suppose I wasn't quite sincere," he admitted, after a moment's reflection.

"You credit me with more benevolence and single-mindedness than I deserve," said Deloraine, returning to the main point. "All the things you enumerate are either simple duties or forms of self-indulgence. You are the self-indulgence: I'm interested in seeing you climb up. Jean may be very persevering and useful. It's not fair to judge her on superficial knowledge. As for Pearl, she made one terrible mistake — which was partly my fault — and, poor thing! she has been suffering for it ever since."

"And you have been behaving quixotically," said Hilary. "I'm tired of being your almoner. It jars upon me horribly to go on presenting this allowance, for which not only do you receive no credit, but which is accepted in rather a bitter spirit, as the unwilling dole of a woman who has acted harshly. And there's no longer any necessity for it. Her child is two years old now, and she has a good many music pupils, and, I think, could get more: she is really talented. She even talked, the last time I

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saw her, of going on with her own studies — but she is always talking about that," he added, with honest pessimism.

"Is she still in the flat in Shepherd's Bush?"

"It's not really a flat," he answered: "it's two rooms in a house. You go in through an ordinary front-door, and upstairs and upstairs and upstairs till you come to her rooms. There's no separate entrance."

"Yes, I know. I'm afraid it's squalid."

"Well, dull — the entrance and the stairs part of it. Her rooms are nicely furnished. It's the same furniture she had at Chelsea, which —" He stopped suddenly, realizing that he had walked serenely into a corner.

"Hilary, I saw him yesterday." Deloraine lifted her head sharply. "He didn't see me; I was in a cab. He looked just as spruce and ship-shape and prosperous as ever. I'm sure his coat was cut to the last minute of fashion. I can't conceive how he manages it. Poor Randolph! He can do nothing whatever, but he has a genius for living."

"There are quantities of men like that," said Hilary. "But how it's done I suppose nobody except themselves will know till the end of time. Throwing bills into the waste-paper basket must obviously have an end, and two years' credit is the same thing as no credit at all as soon as the first two years have elapsed."

"How is Pearl in health?" asked Deloraine.

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"She's not robust, of course, and life to her is evidently only an unavoidable and colourless continuance of days, except for her affection for the child. She seems to make no friends. I think the people about would be willing to be friendly, but she doesn't encourage them. I don't know that you could say that she gets appreciably worse in actual health. She's spiritless: the salt has gone out of her. It does seem a pity, because she could have been such a fine woman."

"Do you ever hear anything of her husband?"

"No, not now. I heard he'd got a living in Leeds; but that was some time ago."

"What tragedies there are in the world that no one suspects the existence of, even though they are in contact with them! That man's life is a persisting tragedy, because he loved Pearl."

"He is one of those men," said Hilary, "for whom some form of tragedy seemed to be ordained, almost necessary for the complement of his character. You couldn't conceive him living an ordinary happy life. In spite of the qualities you admired, he was not really sympathetic. His control of himself seemed to be thrown at you — not intentionally — but still, thrown at you."

"If you can find me his address, I should like to send him news of Pearl," said Deloraine. "I shall continue the allowance, Hilary. If you won't take it, I must find another bearer."

"Oh, if you are determined, I will go on doing it,"

said Hilary unwillingly. "But your inveterate benevolent propensity makes quite a strain on one's nerves. Look at that pile of parcels that is accumulating in your study. I know what they are — Christmas presents — many of them to be sent to people who haven't a shadow of claim upon you. If there is one for me, I decline it here and now."

"But, my dear good soul, don't you understand what I said a moment ago? If you have money enough, the giving of presents is a form of self-indulgence. There is nothing more delightful than choosing things for people, thinking what will give them pleasure and make them feel what a nice person you are, and purchasing and presenting them at no cost to yourself."

"You are deliberately reducing it to the lowest ground," said Hilary, "to deprive yourself of credit. Probably there is no human action in which some selfish motive couldn't be detected under strict analysis. To begin with, all religious people — the followers of an orthodox creed — are tainted, because for every good work they do they expect a posthumous reward. Some try to avoid even the chance of personal cost by doing their good deeds by testament, at the expense of their relatives."

"So you really won't have the little gift I've got for you?" asked Deloraine, with a speculative smile.

"No."

"Then what am I to do with it?"

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"I don't know; unless you ask the shopkeeper to exchange it for its equivalent in something for yourself."

"I can't very well do that, because it didn't come from a shopkeeper. I was going to give you one of my manuscripts. . . . Now you must go," she said quickly, springing up: "it's nearly one."

"Oh, how sweet of you!" Hilary became abrupt and clumsy. His native traits rose up under the influence of an emotion. "I shan't dare to take it — it's such a tremendous thing. I shall be frightened of its value — even its value to the world, and that isn't a tenth of its value to me. Must I go? Oh, I wish I hadn't to — I wish I hadn't to."

He took her hand. The clasp slipped slowly and clung at her finger-tips.

"Good-night."

Still the finger-tips clung.

"Good-night."

When Hilary got back to his flat, he did not immediately go to bed. He was restless, full of flaming thoughts. He walked about his room, thinking, thinking. He sat down in a chair before the dying fire, and still he thought.

His fingers had clung to hers — clung, clung — and, surely, hers had clung to his. If not, his couldn't have held. *His couldn't have held.* In the flash of a vivid moment he sprang to the end of the

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room, and then turned and came back. His own fingers would not cling, with one hand flaccid; but with both curling at the tips, nothing could part them.

And he was to have one of her manuscripts — one of her big works, in her own handwriting, with her corrections — with the deleted passages and the close interlineations — the first state of a book that had burned through Europe and America, and the only copy in the world! Oh, why did she treat him like this?

He saw on his desk the MS. of the last written chapters of his own book, and picked it up. Deloraine had returned it the day before. Her hands had touched it — every page of it. He glanced furtively over his shoulder — as if afraid that he might be watched — and, with almost a guilty movement, lifted the cold sheets and pressed them to his cheeks — first upon one and then upon the other — and then laid them, crumpled, back upon the desk.

CHAPTER III

It will be no surprise to anyone to learn that at this time Hilary had joined the Fabian Society and become an ardent Socialist. The marvel would have been if he had avoided it. He was aglow with enthusiasm for every movement that made for change. It gave him a stirring sense of being in the files of the leaders; he felt he had his hand on the cable of progress.

For several weeks Deloraine had been content to watch his course in interested silence, knowing that it was a period he would have to come through, as she herself had come through it. But at last, one day, when he threw down the gauntlet with more insistence than usual, she picked it up.

They were walking across the frosted Park in the bright cold of a January day. Deloraine's hands were in a big muff. Her pale complexion and dark hair and eyes — thrown into contrast by her mouse-coloured furs and purple hat — and her confident carriage and air of vitality, gave distinction to her appearance, and drew even people who did not know who she was to look at her a second time. The familiar sight of the small crowds of black-coated men, gathered about the chair orators at the Marble

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Arch had taken their talk to the subject of Socialism.

"It's not a political cry," Hilary had said; "it's a great creed, a religion. We shall exorcise the spirit of acquisition — gain and greed and gloating individual hoarding of the common wealth — and replace it by the spirit of service and sacrifice. I don't think you could have a finer aspiration to stimulate action."

Deloraine went on several paces in silence, still thinking she would leave him to time. Then, touched by something a little aggressive in the after-ring of his voice, she decided to answer him.

"That sort of talk is rather meretricious, Hilary. You are only repeating sounding catch-words. What you mean is you want to deprive one class to enrich another."

"We want to enrich no one and to deprive no one," said Hilary. "We wish simply to make a world which is capable of providing adequately for all the people who live on it, provide impartially, so that there should be no waste and no want."

"The idea underlying that," said Deloraine, "has been the inspiring force, not only of modern Socialism, but of all constructive philosophic thought since the world began — the greatest happiness of the greatest number. It is what countless thousands of people down the ages, beyond those whose work has been recorded, have been steadily

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striving for. It is inevitable that everyone, except a complete dullard, finding himself in this world, and seeing human atoms born and die and be forgotten, and generations pass, and seeing the luxury and wealth on one side and the unspeakable squalor on the other, should be brought to speculate, some time or other, upon the motive and design of it all, and be actuated to try and bring a little nearer the fulfilment of that design, when he thinks he has perceived a glimmering of it. One means of giving effect to the intention of which men have believed they have obtained a partial view, is the system or the science or the religion, if you will, called Socialism. Most modern thinkers have been attracted at some period of their lives by its fallacious promise. I have not escaped it."

"You?"

"Oh, I have passed through your period, Hilary. That is why I watch you with so much interest. I was caught in the Socialistic maelstrom at one time. I thought it was heroic — a sublime creed — the supreme abnegation of self. Oh, I chanted your catch-words. My enthusiasm blinded me to its fallacies. But I have gathered calmness and wisdom since then, as you will gather calmness and wisdom. Its fundamental fallacy lies in this: that it presupposes all men to be inherently equal. They are not equal. They are not equal by intellect, and they are not equal by instinct, and it is not possible to make them equal."

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"The inequality is only apparent," said Hilary firmly; "the result of the partial conditions of education and the partial opportunities of advancement that have obtained. Under an enlightened communal government it would disappear. The lower classes have been ground down so long that in many cases it might take two or three generations to raise them to the level of intellect and culture now only reached by the few; but the material is the same, and there is no reason to doubt that it could be done."

"Yes; educate them," said Deloraine; "that is right. You will change individuals—you will bring the gold to the surface and send the dross to the bottom—but you will not change the steadfast conditions of society. In any social conditions there must always be intellectual workers and manual workers; and for intellectual effort, in spite of any temporary upheavals you may bring about, there will always be a greater honour and a greater reward. The stimulus of a higher wage for a higher quality of work is one of the elemental principles upon which the world is driven."

"If it were only the intellectual people and the workers who were receiving a higher wage," said Hilary, "one could view it with some patience. What sticks in one's gullet, when one thinks of the squalor of the masses, is these bloated fools living fatly on inherited wealth."

"Oh, if you are going to talk in that way," said

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Deloraine, "you had better hire a chair at the Marble Arch and get a little crowd around you. Individualism has its imperfections, as every system must. It is inevitable that there must always be a proportion of witless, indolent people living above their fellows on the proceeds of their forefathers' industry, but they are not a justification for sweeping the land with the ruthless sickle of revolution. Material wealth does not stay permanently in the hands of sloths and dullards. Unless a family which has made money produces new energy and intellect in the course of a few generations, its power and prosperity passes."

"Yes, but it doesn't quite satisfy your ideas of justice," said Hilary, "when you see an idle idiot sweeping people into the ditches with his motor-car, to be able to think that his grandchildren will probably be penniless."

"Oh, but you must have tolerance! That's another lesson you have to learn. The world can't be governed without it. The fact that you have so little of it just now ought to help you to see the second great fallacy in the Socialist tenets, which is that humanity is not made of the splendid altruistic material which Socialism has to presume."

"It can be raised to such a quality."

"No, no, no! The individual is essentially lonely; his entity is a separate little universe; he is everlastingly fighting for himself. We don't know why it is so, but all your altruistic visions of social

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reconstruction and all your religions and philosophies cannot alter it, and it is not within our function to criticize it. It's an integral part of the original scheme. Progress would inevitably cease if you removed the factor of individual incentive."

"That is a popular parrot-cry," said Hilary; "it is not a demonstrated fact."

"It is demonstrated by history; communal systems have been tried, and have failed. And it is demonstrated every day and every hour in industrial life: to get the best work out of a man you must give him a personal interest in the result."

"To get the best work out of a man," said Hilary, "you must give him an equal opportunity."

"Oh, you are not content with attacking that anomaly. If you were, you would be working on sound lines. You strike at the system of individual achievement and responsibility. I have the welfare of my fellow-beings quite as much at heart as you can have," she proceeded. "I used to be an insane Socialist like you, but now I am a sane Socialist. I recognise, to begin with, as necessary postulates, man's essential inequality and his essential egoism. It is impossible, perhaps, to have absolutely satisfying social conditions — at least, in our generation — but we can come much nearer the ideal than we have attained at present. There is too little tolerance in the world, too little recognition of brotherhood, too much arbitrary use of power. You must exterminate snobbishness. The possession of

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money or position should give no one an advantage in opportunity. You must use all your efforts to breaking down the conditions which fetter the development of men and women, by increasing the State services to the people, by giving them further and further facilities of education, by relieving necessitous workers from the degrading operation of private benevolence, by opening the avenues of effort to everyone, irrespective of birth or sex."

"We are working for all that," said Hilary, "but we want to do more."

"Yes, you want to be *penal*, too." Deloraine spoke slowly and forcefully. "That is your aim, and that is where you become vicious. Your confiscatory propaganda is immoral; it is tainted at its base. You try to overcome that indictment by saying you recognise no such thing as individual rights of property. You could similarly seek to justify murder by saying you recognised no such thing as individual right of life. If you pick my pocket, you are none the less a thief because you tell me you do it in the sacred cause of universal sacrifice and service."

"I don't want to pick your pocket; I want to bank its contents in a central fund, to be applied to your benefit as a unit of the community."

"In the form of clothes and board and lodging, sufficient to meet my necessities—the clothes, I

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imagine, to be made by the State dressmakers on a regulation model. And you would supply me, would you, with pens and paper, so that I could earn money for the central exchequer, and expect that the work I should do in those conditions would be of the same quality as that which I do now?"

"That is what gives its beauty to the vision of a reorganized State. We should work for each other instead of for ourselves; we should work for the community, and self would be eliminated."

"And is that what the working man is thinking of?" Deloraine suddenly fired — "the working man who is following in his thousands in the trail of your bugle? Is he burning to eliminate self?"

"If he is not, it is the fault of the conditions which have surrounded him hitherto. We are trying to educate him to a higher ideal."

"Clap-trap! You are playing on his cupidity, and you know it. You know that he is hoping, through your schemes, which he doesn't understand, to arrive somehow at a state which will make him a little richer and a little lazier, and which will enable him to grind his heel upon the necks of his present masters."

"And the spirit that goes inside that desire," she concluded, after a moment's pause, "is not a nice spirit, Hilary."

"Whatever it may be at present," he answered,

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after a pause on his side, "we don't believe that that is the spirit which will eventually animate him."

"No, you don't. I believe you are sincere — most of you — you intellectual Socialists; but you are very simple. If you were not simple, you would be committing a crime. You would be committing a cruel crime by inculcating this spirit of rapacity into people whose lot may be alleviated and made less grinding and uninspiring, but which can never be changed for the Utopian Paradise which your doctrines suggest to them."

"We believe they contain the only solution of the social problem," said Hilary doggedly; "and we think that the means we are adopting will be justified by results. We are making headway; we are frightening people; they are trembling at our growing numbers, and in the end we think we shall make them tremble with reason."

"That is the lowest ground of all," said Deloraine. "I've stripped you to your tainted core. You will strike by every means for power, and use it, if you get it, mercilessly. You will *show* your power. There was malice in that speech, Hilary. I don't deny that you may get the power. You are appealing to the passions of the masses; the masses can provide a majority, and under constitutional government a majority can do anything. We have had reigns of terror before; we may have them again. The fact that it can be done does not jus-

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tify it. In the course of a few months or years conditions would revert to the old order, but many thousands of innocent people would have been buried in the débris. The fruit of long years of toil would have been torn from hands too old or infirm to recover it. Oh, *you* would be all right — you individually — you are a clever man. There shows the falsity of the personal altruism you assume. There are two kinds of capital that never can be taken from the individual — he may lose them, but they can never be filched from him by his fellow-men — his brain and his reputation. Those who possess them will rise blithely from social cataclysms. Some of you Fabians have both; all of you have one. You are fond of posing as disinterested benefactors to your race. Do you know what you seem to me to be? You seem to be a little band of men standing on a rock, with lifebelts safely strapped about you, calling on the good God to send down the flood.”

“Now, having listened to all that,” she said sweetly — they had reached Hyde Park Corner — “I think you may come to tea.”

CHAPTER IV

THEY found Jean Mariner in the drawing-room, reading a novel. She had now been installed nearly a month as Deloraine's secretary, and filled that position, on the whole — spite of some sterner monotony than she had expected — with satisfaction to herself; whether with equal satisfaction to her employer had not been divulged.

Hilary continued to find her delightful to get on with. Conversation with her involved no strain. It was like a visit to the Gaiety after a strenuous day's work. He felt a lazy lack of responsibility. To-day, after his stringent mental contest in the Park, he particularly welcomed a talk with her. The game of never knowing anything had become piquantly enjoyable.

She greeted him with a charming smile, disregarding Deloraine, whom she had already seen several times that day.

"What exactly," she said to him, as he sat down beside her, "is a polytechnic?"

She kept a series of questions up her sleeve for him; for the game, on her side, was equally appreciated, perhaps all the more because she could not gauge the extent of Hilary's bluff.

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"I can't say," he answered. "I never know whether it's a building or an excursion."

"I think it's a kind of panorama."

"Well, that could be in a building."

"Yes, but is it work or play? And do you pay to go in?"

"You can't go into an excursion; there's nothing to go into."

"I don't believe it's an excursion at all. I think it's something like a free library."

"Just now you said it was a panorama."

"Yes; that's why I wanted to know if you had to pay. If it was a free library, you wouldn't. You generally have to pay for things," she added with a sigh.

"Of course you don't. Pretty people never have to pay."

She passed the daring adjective with careless complacency, as a commonplace.

This emboldened Hilary to further adventures. "I wonder," he said, "what it feels like when you look in a glass?"

"It feels lovely," she replied, with lively candour.

"It must be very soothing and satisfactory," he commented, "to be able to summon a beautiful picture at will."

"Don't be impertinent, Hilary." This remark came from Deloraine. Since pouring the tea, she had been reading her afternoon letters.

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"Oh, I don't mind," said Jean.

"That's the trouble," said Deloraine; "you ought to mind."

"Another thing I want to know," said Jean, turning again to Hilary, "is what makes a man a professor? I know what makes a man a doctor."

"What's that?"

"Oh, curing illnesses, or trying to, or pretending to."

"Good," said Hilary. "'Pretending to' 's good."

"But what makes a man a professor?"

"Professing to know something."

"Know what?"

"Anything."

"Stars and things?"

"Yes, and chemicals and gases and things."

"That's another thing I want to know. What are gases?"

"Things you turn off."

"Or forget to."

"'Forget to' 's good," said Hilary.

"I expect I'm very stupid," said Jean, who wasn't quite accepting this; "but I think you're just as bad. I wonder now and then," she said ingenuously, "how you are able to write for papers — knowing so little."

This was said quite seriously and seemed to be a

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genuine sentiment; and for a moment Hilary felt damped. Deloraine distinctly smiled over her letters.

"Oh, it's a mistake to know a great deal," he returned, quickly regaining his composure. "If you know too much, you are dull."

"You are not at all dull."

"There you are, you see," said Hilary, unabashed.

"But you would be more valuable if you knew more. Now I've come to London, I want to find out about everything — things that people in London know. Do tell me one thing. What's a long firm?"

"A long firm?" said Hilary, gravely and thoughtfully. This genuinely bothered him.

"You keep seeing in the papers about long firm frauds."

"Oh, that's a firm with a lot of partners — too long for an ordinary firm and too short for a company. Don't you see?"

He watched her speculatively, wondering if she would swallow it.

Deloraine got up.

"Are you going?" asked Hilary, with slight surprise, partly expostulatory and partly apologetic.

"Yes; I'm tired of your silly chatter. I can't spare you long, Jean."

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She went out, giving her skirts the smallest hint of a swish.

"How many does it take to make a company?" asked Jean, returning to the previous question, when Hilary came back to his chair.

"Two, if they're sympathetic."

Jean blushed gracefully. "Then we're company now?"

"Oh, we were company before," said Hilary, not prepared to be dishonest and disloyal, even in jest. He was wondering why Deloraine had gone out.

"Do you admire Deloraine very much?" asked Jean, with just an appreciable pout.

This was not a subject which Hilary was willing to discuss. "She's tremendously clever," he said evasively. "She has been giving me a terrible slating this afternoon."

"What for?"

"For being a Socialist."

"Oh, do tell me about Socialism."

"This is Socialism," said Hilary.

"Oh, but she didn't mean *that*," said Jean, patiently not quite sure.

"Why not play me something?" he asked, again declining to be drawn.

Jean readily went to the piano and ran her fingers over the keys.

"Why not sing me something?"

"I don't know," said Jean dubiously, still finger-

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ing the notes and swaying a little on the music-stool.

"Perhaps Deloraine is working."

"Well, whisper, and I shall hear."

"Oh, winds that blow from the south,"

she broke forth in a tender soprano —

"Sighing so soft and low,
Tell me your secret sweet,
Whisper, and I shall know.
Oh, winds that blow from the south,
Breathe in my list'ning ear,
Come from the heart of my lo-ve,
Whisper, and I shall hear;
Come from the heart of my lo-ve,
Oh, whisper, and I — shall hear."

Her fingers rattled over the keys; her eyes flashed for a moment round at Hilary.

"Whisper you love me, darling,
Say that your heart is true;
Whisper you love me, darling,
Just as you used to do."

"Oh, how did I use to do it?" said Hilary desperately.

Again the slender fingers rippled and danced over the keys, working up new and more fervent passion for a repetition of the refrain.

At that moment the door opened, and the butler came in to take out the tea-tray.

"Mrs. Wynne asked me to say," he said to Jean, as he lifted the tray, "that she would like you to go to her."

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Jean graduated the rippling accompaniment into a sedate impromptu. Then she rose, made Hilary the slightest of grimaces, and followed the butler from the room.

CHAPTER V

HILARY went home with the feeling that in some mysterious way he had offended Deloraine. He had felt it before he left her house; for, being conspicuously abandoned to his own devices, he had found unusual difficulty in opening the door of her study, where she was working with Jean, to say good-bye. She had interrupted her dictation to give her hand to him courteously and kindly; but his mind, strung to peculiar sensitiveness as regarded his standing with her, had appreciated a shade of difference in her manner. He had missed an indefinable something which went to the usual intimate note.

Certainly, he reflected, Jean and he had made a considerable row in the drawing-room, which perhaps was unfair, if Deloraine had been trying to work. But he would have expected her to come back in a flare of assumed severity and order him summarily to go home. It was the formality of her method in withdrawing Jean which worried him. Then he wondered if it could be possible that she was seriously annoyed at his socialistic opinions. It occurred to him that she had talked a great deal of sense that afternoon, as she always did; and he knew in his heart that she meant so much more to

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him than any social or ethical or political views whatever, that he would throw them to the winds rather than raise a barrier between them. Very likely she was right; very likely he was spiteful and malicious, and deceived himself into thinking he had the good of his fellows at heart. He knew he felt aggressively socialistic at public functions graced by society, when he saw people penned in various enclosures and thought of the insufferable smallness of staking off human beings into degrees of superiority. But then he felt shamefully socialistic when he was in a motor-car and saw a string of trudging workmen move out of his way as a matter of course; he felt he should like to get out and apologise to them — to explain that he knew he had no more natural right to be seated in a car than they. But whatever the spring of his sentiments, if Deloraine was troubled by his possession of them, he would yield them to her, he would lay them at her feet. If she bade him for her pleasure — if he might kiss her hand — he would set up a feudal state and govern his serfs. Oh, why had she stopped Jean's song in just that way? Why had she wished him good-bye in just that tone?

During the next day and the one following he worried about this whenever his mind was unoccupied, and two nights he tossed restlessly to sleep, searching for causes. On the evening of the second day he was taking her to a play. He had looked forward to this meeting through the uneasy hours

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since he left her, as one which must either clear his mind of its fancies or confirm them.

He dressed carefully and arrived at her house some minutes before his appointed time. Never since he came to London had he stood on that doorstep strung to so keen a point of anxious emotion. At least she was coming to the play, he assured himself. If she had changed her mind, she would have sent him word. Or was she preparing a more poignant disappointment? Should he find her quietly at work, apparently oblivious of the engagement?

The first glance at her, when he entered, dispersed his misgivings. She was ready waiting for him, superbly dressed in a purple gown of softest chiffon-velvet. A dazzling diamond pendant lay upon her bosom. Her one jewel, it shone from her warm, white skin like a solitary star on an opal sunset. It seemed to him she had stooped to deck with the arts of her sex a person carrying, unadorned, essential distinction. And he was conscious, in a more vivid degree than at any time before, of the blood that beat beneath the snow.

She appeared to have forgotten the change in her manner at their last parting, or perhaps she had never realized it. Jean was not there. She had gone to dine in Kensington, Deloraine told him, with some friends of her mother. He was glad. She was connected in his mind with the little incident of his previous visit which had brought him so much troublous thought.

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"That star is Venus," he said.

"Venus?" said Deloraine slowly, her eyes curiously fixed on him. "Why Venus?"

"It is all by itself, and it is so brilliant."

She touched it with her forefinger, slightly lifting it from her bosom. "It was given me by a beautiful, white-haired French Marquise, whom I once visited at her house — one of the many kind friends whom my books have made for me. Do you like it?"

She seemed almost to invite him to touch it. But he dared not trust the impression. In touching it, he must almost inevitably have touched her skin also, and that was a distracting encroachment such as he could not contemplate, could not imagine being permitted him. So he bent a little forward, keeping his hands studiously clasped behind him, and said that he admired it immensely.

"You were not looking at it," said Deloraine, with a laugh. She covered it with her hand. "Tell me how many large stones there are in it?"

He knew he had not looked at it, that he couldn't have looked at it upon a background so much more beautiful, and he didn't mind her knowing.

"I don't know," he said shamelessly, and looked straight into her face.

"Poor Marquise!" she said, with the slightest catch in her voice, dropping her eyes to look at the pendant. "It has five large stones and twenty

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smaller ones. Ask Invers if the brougham is here? ”

The play was one which had been adapted from the French and fitted to English conditions, to its detriment. Deloraine, who knew the exactions of a playwright's task, was a generous critic of the work of others; and her feeling, as she watched, was one of warm sympathy with the author, whose play had been unceremoniously tortured to meaningless flimsiness.

“Do you think it should have been produced as it was written?” asked Hilary, who was deliciously happy, though he knew the play was a bad one. Deloraine's manner had an inclining, almost a dependent, quality in it which it had never contained before.

“No, I don't think it ought to have been adapted at all,” she replied. “English audiences have not reached a sufficiently high level of impersonality to be able to watch pregnant plays without constraint.”

She became quiet as the evening advanced. In the interval before the last act she hardly spoke at all; and Hilary, content to feel he was near her, did not interrupt her thoughts. At the end of the play she went out equally quietly, turning confidently from time to time to make sure that Hilary was at her side. The personal gratification stirring him, as he assured her of his presence, was augmented suddenly, almost overwhelmed, by a flood of pride

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at the recollection that this human and attractive being, glancing round to him with intimate confidence, was the distinguished woman who held so high a place in the world's esteem. This was Mrs. Randolph Wynne! This woman who was watching for him, smiling upon him, leaning to him!

She was still silent while he put her into the brougham and took his place by her side. It was a curious stillness, which seemed somehow freighted with things to come. When they had driven a short distance, one of his hands — the one nearest to her — whether by accident or design he did not know himself — dropped to the seat at his side and fell upon one of hers. His impulse was to lift it at once apologetically; but some magnetic force, in the instant that it touched, charged him to leave it, if but for a second; and hers was not withdrawn. Beating, thrilling, he let it remain from moment to moment and from minute to minute. Then, slowly, his fingers encircled hers, folded them, finally clasped them. So they stayed for the rest of the way, and during all the drive not one word was spoken. He watched the street-lights that flashed across the road as they passed them, and they seemed to him like separate suns.

When the brougham stopped and he got down to help her out, he was exalted to a point which allowed him scarcely to know himself or his surroundings. He supposed that this was the same house he had entered so often, but it did not appear the same.

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In the minutes that had elapsed since he got into the brougham at the theatre doors it seemed to him he had walked into a new world — a world he had not seen before nor ever projected in imagination. He had imagined many wonderful and beautiful external worlds, but never the new world that had arisen within himself.

For Deloraine there had been no such instant metamorphosis, but the culmination that had gradually come upon her was even more bewildering in its effect. Since the afternoon, two days ago, when she had been a witness of Hilary's lazy flirtation with Jean, her outlook on life had changed. Insistently and sharply it had brought home to her the nature of her interest in him. She had realized that she could not endure that that flirtation should continue, and that she would not endure it; and she had felt that the power to put a period to it lay in her own hands. Beyond that she had not thought; she had not looked forward. All this evening she had been yielding herself gratefully to a changed condition — easily, softly — resting simply in a happy warmth that had been breathed about her. Now events were working swiftly to a climax she could scarcely appreciate. Hilary's touch in the carriage had seemed natural; she had expected it. But what did it mean? Where was it leading to? A glowing purple haze enveloped her. As she took his hand to descend from the brougham a sense of fear, of ecstasy, shivered through her, and the purple haze wrapped her in a swaying mist.

CHAPTER VI

WITHOUT being conscious of having reached it by her own volition, Deloraine found herself in her study, with Hilary standing in front of her, holding her hands. The door was closed and her cloak had been removed. The square room, with its draped windows and lines of books, with its many souvenirs of her travels and its shaded lights, its air of mingled comfort and utility, struck her as unexpectedly familiar. It seemed like the room of someone else, which she knew well, and had entered again after a long lapse of time. Her mind told her it was her own study, but she could not imbue it with the sense of ownership and habitual use. She was strangely thrilled and trembling.

"Rainey!" she heard him say.

"I don't feel that I know you," she said. "You have never behaved like this before. Why have you taken my hands?"

"I love you, Rainey," he said, very gently. "Don't you know?"

"Yes, I know. Oh, I hoped you did." She uttered the words quite simply. She knew she was speaking the truth, yet she had a curious sense that it was a truth that had been expounded to her, and

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not one that she had herself realized. "Let us sit down."

They sat on a settee, standing at right angles to the fire, built to a cheerful blaze in expectation of her late return.

Hilary took her hands again. He could not believe in the reality of what was taking place. The golden air of it was too bright.

"You hoped so!" he said slowly, in the same gentle voice. "Then you are glad? Then you want me? Then you — love me?"

The last words were breathed, in a tense whisper, very close to her lips.

Suddenly she caught him and kissed him with a hurricane of kisses — passionate, devouring.

"Yes, yes," she poured upon his ears, in a splendour of abandonment; "I don't know what has made it, what has brought it, what has charged me unutterably with a storm of new life and demand that has obliterated everything, but I do, I do, I do!"

She clung and clung. Hilary's arms were about her. He could not find himself. His head was reeling. A whole life's volume of joy had been rained on him in a few hours out of a drab sky. Oh, the blood beneath the snow! But his imagination, in its vividest pictures, had not reached a conception of this unfathomable well of sense in her.

He could not speak. There are moments when

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the softest, fullest deepest words sound rough. His fingers wandered about her, half tentatively, half ecstatically, and slowly he drew her closer and closer. And then he began to kiss her with lingering touches — her hair, her eyes, her cheeks, her lips, her neck.

“Oh, Hilary! . . . Oh! . . . Oh! . . . Oh!”

Each repetition of the word came from her in a lower tone, till it fell beneath her breath. She seemed to be sinking into a trance. Her limbs had lost their use. She became a flaccid, boneless weight in his arms. She laid across him — inert, helpless, in his power.

At that moment he could have done with her whatever he chose, and he knew it. The perception of his power almost frightened him. What an awful, mysterious thing was this ability that had been given to men to gain women, even the greatest women! What vast and bewildering possibilities of misuse lay in the hands of men! For he was impressed by no self-satisfying thought that this was a peculiar attribute allotted to him separately. It was the realization of the tremendous world-force which awed and amazed him, and held him in check. He delayed, dallied, and began to talk. He began to talk, when he should have gathered the wondrous harvest. He set up in his mind a pretence that he had not won her, though he knew he had, to make food for words.

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"Dearest," he said, bending close to her, "what a sweet world it is! We will never separate again. You may do what you like — you. You've often said so. You've wrung that from them by your genius — the right to the government of your own soul and body. So it won't matter that we can't marry. Your position will not suffer."

He finished hurriedly, and tried to clasp her more tightly, realizing suddenly that he was frittering his golden good. He had checked the claim of emotion and invited the intervention of her mind. Her muscles stiffened and regained their efficacy; she sat up.

Her eyes flamed. "How little you are!"

She had become a forceful woman again, firmly directing the tide of her surging vitality.

"With such possibilities of bigness," she enunciated, slowly and steadily, "you are sometimes so little I can scarcely see you."

He stretched to her vehemently, almost angrily, faced suddenly and unexpectedly by the fear of losing her. "You rend me by your violent changes," he cried. "You *won't* be the same from moment to moment. Why have you altered so completely all at once?"

"You could talk," she replied, in a voice dropped to a tense undertone and vibrating with contempt. "about what might be thought, or might not be thought, by — *other people*."

"That was for your sake, not for mine."

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"I care nothing for the world's judgment," she cried, with magnificent scorn, "but I care for my own."

"You can't think it would be wrong?"

In his earnestness, Hilary was now assailing the least vulnerable part of her. His appeal to her sense had been an appeal to her weakness; in appealing to her mind, he appealed to her strength.

"No," she answered. "People say, or suggest, that sex is immoral. That is not true. Nothing less true has ever been spoken. There was more generosity in the making of the world than the world has recognised. If you and I were alone on the earth, we could obey the call that we have for one another, and ourselves would be the arbiters of the just measure of obedience to it. But, for the governance and happiness of so many millions, it has become necessary to fix and uphold an exact and unaltering measure. That is what we call marriage. And as good citizens of the world, we must submit to it, for none must be a traitor to his kind."

Hilary listened to her with a drab sense of loss, heavy in proportion to his previous exaltation. It was not due to her words, but to the perception that passion had gone out of her, and was replaced by the close working of her subtle brain. Even if he could confute her in argument — a contingency, from his experience, exceedingly remote — he would not bring her again to the domination of her senses. A few moments before Deloraine Wynne had been

his mistress — that amazing, reeling fact had been achieved — she had surrendered herself utterly. And by his crudity — because he had not remembered the exquisitely vibrant quality of the strings he was touching — he had thrown to the winds that wonderful fortune. Already it seemed so far away, so unattainable, that he could hardly believe it had ever been in his grasp.

He went on talking dully. “But we cannot marry.”

“No; we are among those who have to pay the price for the welfare of mankind. You and I are meeting the bill, Hilary.”

The fact that she included herself quite naturally, and some suggestion of simple fortitude in the gentle smile with which she accompanied the words, appealed sharply to the strength and chivalry in him.

“Are *you* meeting it?” he asked, with some shame.

“Yes,” she replied simply.

“Still,” he said, after a pause, “you and I are not quite in the same boat, Rainey. You have been married. Whatever there is in material love you know. If there is much, you know; if there is little, you know; how much or how little, you know.”

She smiled pensively, almost with amusement. “Then you wanted me from curiosity?”

“No, no, no!” he cried impetuously. “I wished for you because I loved you, because I love you now, and shall always love you.” Caught in a sudden

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gust of emotion and impulse, he wrapped her in his arms before she saw his intention. "Oh, don't ruin our lives for an academic shibboleth. We have only one life — and it runs swiftly. Let us get out of it what there is in it." He was holding her fiercely, speaking close to her lips. "There is such a cup for us, Rainey, prepared by that supreme generosity you spoke of. We are not like ordinary folk — either of us. We are stored with a voltage of magnetism a hundredfold greater than they. And the whole of its terrific force is turned tumultuously upon one another."

She struggled and freed herself. "It is not generous of you," she said with difficulty, speaking between deep gasps. "I have a harder fight to win than you, and you should help me. Don't you understand that women often have a harder fight than men, though they generally fight better? I know there is something wanting, but there is much that we have got. We have gained a great deal to-night and all these months, in sympathy and knowledge of one another and mutual help. Oh, help me, dear!" — and suddenly she covered her face and shivered — "for I am very sensual — much more sensual than you."

At once — absolutely and completely — Hilary struck his flag. All the manhood and chivalry and strength in him sprang to the support of her and himself. He felt no longer like a lover, a suitor,

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but like a father, a brother, who would fight for her, die for her, and look for no reward. A brute could have gained his point, for she was again weak. Hilary got up and began turning the articles on the mantelpiece. For several minutes he did not speak.

"I like this funny little harlequin," he said at last. "Where did you get it? Nuremberg, didn't you?"

She made no reply. He pulled a big chair to the front of the fender and poked the fire. Then he calmly helped himself from some decanters standing on a side-table, stuck the glass on the mantelpiece, and lighted a pipe.

Deloraine watched him without perception. When he had reached final settlement, however, an amused smile gradually came into her face.

"Are you proposing to spend the night here?" she asked.

"I thought I would smoke one pipe, if you didn't mind," said Hilary. He got up and went back to the side-table. "What will you have? He hasn't brought your milk." He placed a glass containing some white, opaque fluid behind a pile of books.

"I'll have some soda-water, then."

"That's awfully bad for you," said Hilary, pouring out some wine. "You can blow him up in the morning," he continued, handing her the glass; "but you mustn't drink soda-water."

"What's this?"

"I don't know. Taste it."

"Why is soda-water bad for you?" she asked, obediently taking a sip.

"It has germs in it, I think, or else it's starchy."

She began to laugh; then she put down her glass. "Where is Jean?" she asked, led to the question by an obvious train of thought.

"She has got back and gone to bed long ago. You asked Invers when we came in. Don't you remember.

"Did I? Did I?"

A little later he got up. She also rose, and he stood in front of her for a moment, holding himself very straight. He held out his hands, but she would not give him hers.

"It took us to the precipice," she said.

"I behaved unkindly, roughly," he said. "Will you forgive me?"

"Yes."

"And at least — though we mustn't even — touch . . . at least — say it again — you love me?"

Her eyes swam, but they met his.

"Yes."

CHAPTER VII

WHATEVER they suffered in their separate souls, Hilary and Deloraine were careful, after that night, to keep the form of their mutual intercourse studiously platonic. It was more rigid than that: it was almost stoical. Knowing how easily they could be swung into the whirlpool of passion, they avoided even such expressions of sympathy or affection as a simple friendship claims. Undiscerning strangers, seeing them together, were deceived into thinking their distance denoted coldness. They were known to be intimate friends; but they never touched hands, never used playful or confident terms, never displayed for one another personal appreciation or concern or emotion of any kind. There was quiet recognition, quiet regard, and nothing more. Even Jean noticed a subtle change in the atmosphere. She fitted it with a slightly complacent explanation, which perhaps was true, though not so directly as she imagined.

Hilary, meantime, continued, all that winter and spring, to work steadily at his book. Chapter by chapter Deloraine watched its progress with secret admiration and satisfaction, but openly with steady counsel, mixed from time to time with such judicious measure of her private estimate as was necessary to

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keep up his enthusiasm. He had the power of writing in a scholarly and easy way, which impressed his capability, and under Deloraine's influence the book's youthful violence was modified. The questions of the home and of marriage were treated with breadth of view and with sufficient regard for cherished beliefs to prevent the alienation of the average reader. Hilary yielded nothing in principle; he refused to say anything that he did not think, but he submitted ruefully to many of the friendly depredations of Deloraine's blue pencil.

The book was finished in April, and he had corrected the proofs before Deloraine left London for West Drewton two months later.

"I think it will have to make a stir of some kind," she said, as she parted from him; "I hope it will be the right kind of stir."

When she returned, in September, it had just been published. Its birth was uneventful; and as day followed day, he began to be oppressed — oddly, almost laughably — by the perception of the fact that nothing happened. His great work upon which he had spent so many heavy hours and days and months, over which he had thought so deeply and felt so strongly, and to whose issue he had looked eagerly and fearfully forward as to a momentous event, had been launched upon the world, and nothing happened. His fellow-journalists congratulated him, a few private friends wrote enthusiastically, and Deloraine gathered him scraps of

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cheering information. That was all. He read his publisher's advertisements, but nobody else appeared to do so; the reviewers went into no paroxysms either of praise or of abuse, and he had to search the booksellers' windows for the sight of an occasional copy. He thought that the name he had made as an effective journalist and a writer for the reviews on social subjects would have lifted him to a market. That did not fail him, but its extent was more limited than he imagined. He had yet to introduce himself to the great body of general readers which decides the fortunes of print within a binding.

Weeks passed, and he had forced himself to face the blow that his book — the stringently gathered fruits of his life of persistent, fervid thought — had fallen flat, had been a frost. He did not lose faith in it; but there were so many books and so many calls on the public ear, and his had been lost in the multitude of them. Politicians and novelists, playwrights and musicians, actresses and advertising clerics, were bawling their claims from press and platform and pulpit, and his voice had not been heard. And while this feeling was still with him, there mingled with it, in some curious, unobtrusive, contradictory way — he scarcely knew by what means it came — the knowledge that the book was getting hold. This grew and gradually obliterated the earlier feeling. Without being conscious of having crossed any bridge, his mental condition

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changed from the stern depression of a man who has failed in a fierce effort to the unemotional quiescence of one whose work is recognised. There was no intervening period of beating exhilaration produced by the sudden consciousness of success.

When it got to hear of it, Society — always indulgently indifferent to bolts hurled against itself — decided to read “Sex and Social Order,” as a book which dealt with human subjects with pleasant vigour. It felt it was being serious, while at the same time deriving a good deal of piquant enjoyment. There was excitement in reading “this man Thornton”; he was not a fixed quantity; you never knew what he might not say. The ordinary author had certain definite bounds; he might write well or he might write ill, but he always wrote within those bounds; you were not stimulated by the thought of possible literary adventures. Thornton cantered blithely outside the bounds when his argument required it, and cantered blithely back again without appearing even breathless. He swept through difficult country without fear and without self-consciousness. That tickled Society. At least, the man was not feeble. He went for his fences. And he was vehemently in earnest, and he understood his subject.

So by degrees the book got talked about; and Hilary began to realize, somewhat to his chagrin as a journalist, that there are circumstances where the tongue is mightier than the pen. “Have you

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read so-and-so?" is worth a column in the *Times*.

During this period he went to see Deloraine oftener than at any time since the memorable evening when they had unlocked their secrets and been carried together so tumultuously. He knew that in her he was sure of finding a sympathetic listener and talker, to discuss the absorbing subject of the book's fortunes. All his reviews had to be shown to her, all his letters read, all his conversations reported. Sometimes he dined at her house; sometimes he made fleeting visits of a few moments; sometimes, when she was closely occupied, she told him quite kindly, but unceremoniously, to go away.

On the day when he heard that the book had gone into a second edition he hurried to Pont Street to bring her the momentous news. But he found, to his keen disappointment, that she was out. After waiting for a quarter of an hour in her study, in the hope of her return, he was caught by the sound of the typewriter clicking in the adjoining room, and thought he would go and see Jean. He felt a strenuous need of someone to talk to. By this time Jean had become a fairly proficient typist, and had proved herself at least of sufficient practical service to Deloraine to outlast the month which Hilary had originally assigned to her secretarial office. She was seated with her back to him as he entered, and he was struck anew by the graceful lines of her figure — so wonderfully slender, and yet so enticingly supple and curved.

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"Monarch of all you survey," he said, closing the door and taking a seat beside her, "and industrious to boot."

"What does 'to boot' mean?" she asked, with her pretty frown. "I often wonder."

She turned from the typewriter, pleased in a double measure to have an opportunity both of ceasing work and of talking to Hilary.

"So do I," said Hilary.

"Oh, I wish you would sometimes know something."

"It comes out of Shakespeare, I think," he suggested lightly.

"Yes; but what does it *mean*?"

"It means 'in addition.'"

"Yes; but why does it mean that?"

"If you'll go into Deloraine's study and get a Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, I'll look it up and tell you."

"No; if *you'll* go and get the dictionary, I'll look it up and tell *you*."

"But I don't want to know."

"Oh, you *are* lazy. I wonder you ever got your book written."

"Oh, the writing's armchair business. You don't have to be tidy. It's the typist who does all the hard work."

"She has to fill just as much paper, anyhow, and it is so tiring. Sometimes Deloraine does nothing at all but just walk about the room; and I have

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to write it all down first, and then type it afterwards, because she says the clicking worries her if I do it while she is talking. And yet she gets paid about a million times as much. I don't think it's fair. Look at my fingers."

The fingers were very shapely — as she very well knew — white and slender and supple. There was a faint rosy tinge at the tips, and Hilary wished he could kiss them.

"Poor little fingers!" he said.

She acknowledged this with a demure blush and a slightly arch look.

"Tell me about your book," she said in return for his tender concern.

"Oh, it's getting quietly slated. They don't believe in socialism and free-love; they say there are two commandments in the way. They believe in those old tabloids — I mean tablets."

"What tablets?"

"Don't you know? The tablets of stone that came down from the mountain."

"You don't mean in the Bible?" Her tone changed.

"Of course I do."

"I don't think you ought to talk in that way." She was genuinely shocked and troubled.

"I'm very sorry — truly," he said, with penitence. "I didn't intend to say anything to hurt you. But I don't think the Church itself quite accepts the fables in Genesis."

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"Oh, yes, it does."

Her tone of final authority left him dumb.

"If socialism and free-love," she said firmly, "means doing what we are told not to do in the Bible, I don't believe in either of them, and I'm sure it's no good at all your going on with them."

"Well, but supposing we admit the commandments, and say they have been wrongly interpreted?"

"You can't misinterpret simple words, such as you mustn't kill or steal. It's silly to talk in such a way."

"The subject is rather complex," said Hilary, who was far from uninterested by her attitude of unquestioning faith. He knew it was an enormous factor.

"Of course, I know I'm stupid, but I understand the commandments — that's enough. I don't think I know what socialism is, and I'm sure I don't know what free-love is. I thought it *was* free."

"No; it's fettered by conditions. Free-love means dispensing with the indissoluble bond." He watched her with a thoughtful smile of impersonal experimental interest.

"Yes," she said prettily. "But still I don't understand."

"It means simply the voluntary expression of sex impulse — the denial of the principle of property in women."

She knitted her brows. "I wish you wouldn't

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use such long words. It makes me feel so foolish."

"It's rather difficult to express it plainly. Well, it's just two people being able to become everything to one another."

"Everything?" There was a startled note.

"Yes."

"Not — not without marriage."

"Yes."

"Oh, what horrid notions!"

She turned quickly to the typewriter to relieve the tension of an awkward subject.

"Let me help you," said Hilary.

"*Can* you type?" She looked round dubiously.

"I'm a past-master; I've been decorated with the insignia of the Ancient Order."

She got up and gave him her seat. "Come and try, then. See how much you can get done before Deloraine comes back. She's awfully particular about the commas and things being right; and all those dashes she makes, you *must* put them in."

Hilary turned up his shirt-cuffs as if he were going to play golf, obviously gaining time while he surveyed the problem before him.

"Oh, but this isn't the instrument I'm used to," he said; "the letters are not in the right place. I want the 'e' over here — I can't do with the 'e' there — I never saw an 'e' there. If you put the 'e' in the right place, I can do a hundred words a minute."

"A hundred words a minute!" cried Jean, mak-

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ing a rapid calculation. "That's a thousand words in ten minutes. That's—oh—oh . . . ten—one . . . twenty—two . . . thirty—three . . . forty—four . . . fifty—five . . . six thousand words in an hour. You'll do the book in an afternoon. Oh, do start!"

"Yes; but I told you the 'e' wasn't in the right place. 'N-e-a,'" he spelled slowly, pressing the letters, "'r'—where's 'r'?' It ought to be here—it has run away. I don't believe there is an 'r.' This edition of the typewriter is incomplete."

"Here!" said Jean, pointing to the general geographical position of "r,"—"here! Oh, don't you see?" She took his finger and pressed it on the letter.

Hilary affected to be clumsier than he really was; the more manual assistance she gave him, the more clumsy he affected to be. He felt a pleasant little thrill every time her fingers touched him.

"Oh, you are making such a mess of the paper!" she complained, as she directed his manipulations with both her hands, her soft, redolent form pressed close to him. "You touched the hyphen just then instead of the 't,' and you pressed that line of full-stops much too hard—every one of them has almost bored a hole. Doing lines of full-stops looks easy," she explained, "but it needs a very delicate touch. Oh, it's no good!" she sighed resignedly, as he wrote "the" with a central "h" and two supporting signs of multiplication. "I don't believe

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you ever saw, much less touched, a typewriter before. It was absurd to pretend you could do it, because you were bound to be found out. You must have a clean piece of paper to practise upon."

She took out the disfigured sheet and examined it with a delicious pout of affected annoyance; then quickly slipped in a new one.

"Now," she said magisterially, taking a seat beside him, "I'll give you a few preliminary instructions."

A skirt rustled through the hall, and then a neighbouring door closed.

Hilary got up. "There's Deloraine," he said. "I must go."

"Oh!"

The disappointment was genuine and unmistakable.

"I'll come and help you another day," he said at the door.

CHAPTER VIII

JEAN told herself that if Deloraine had not been married, she might — *might* — have been a little jealous. In existing circumstances she was not jealous at all. It would be ridiculous to be jealous of a married woman, even if she cared enough about Hilary. Deloraine could help him in his work, and she understood his strange talk. He didn't speak to her indulgently, as if she were a child. She wondered how people came to understand these curious, technical, dull things — how one could get to understand them. She had been to good schools, and she knew her French verbs — well, some of them. But French verbs didn't seem to be any use. They had nothing to do with socialism and free-love, and the woman question, and tariff reform, and art, and romance, and realism, and the new theology, and the things she heard talked about. Of course, in regard to looks, there could be no question: Deloraine had what was called a striking face, but she — she looked in a glass — had a beautiful face. It was not conceited to think that, because it was obvious; it would be pure affectation to pretend to think otherwise.

After the afternoon of the experiment on the typewriter, she began to clothe herself from day to

day in various charms, in anticipation of his chance visits. She never knew when he might come; but he always found her, on his visits, tantalizingly seductive in some fresh and becoming gown. And he grew into a habit of seeing more of her than he had done hitherto. If he did not meet her in the ordinary course when he came to the house, he made a point of going into her room before he left. There was a human as well as an æsthetic pleasure in being able to look upon anyone whose appearance so completely satisfied the visionary sense, and it satisfied his vanity to be greeted by a smile of welcome from eyes which could light so delightfully. He always felt irresponsibly cheerful in her company, and the mood found expression in the spontaneous flow of his faculty of making himself agreeable. Jean thought he was certainly the nicest man she had met in London. She looked upon him as a light and happy, perpetually good-humoured being. She didn't suppose, she said to herself, that he could be cross if he tried.

Deloraine noticed her constantly attractive toilets, and she noticed the bright eyes after her talks with Hilary and the increasing frequency of those talks. She thought she must speak to Hilary. This was not prompted by a personal incentive. His interviews with Jean were too light and perfunctory to rouse the fierce passion which could have been moved in her by definite cause. But she saw there was a surface attraction between them, and she knew the

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effect which the law of sex could exercise, through constant propinquity, even upon natures essentially incompatible. She could imagine nothing more incongruous than any *rapprochement* between these two — the one a deep, stirring, unplumbed and unregulated force, the other a simple, unimaginative butterfly. If they were to continue their easy intimacy, and Hilary did not marry her, Jean would certainly be made unhappy; but not so unhappy as she would be made if he did marry her.

In many respects, however, Jean was well able to take care of herself — a failure to appreciate which fact led Hilary into occasional mistakes.

"I'm going," he said one day, with rather unnecessary emphasis, as he rose from his seat, after half an hour's talk. He had found Deloraine engaged when he arrived, so had gone in to see Jean.

"Oh no!" said Jean, with a touch of peevishness.

"Oh, but I am!"

"You always go so soon."

"I shall stay another ten minutes for that," said Hilary, promptly sitting down. "You see the penalty you have to pay for being polite? You won't be so polite again, will you?"

"Yes," said Jean — "always. I shall always be polite."

"That might be taken either way," remarked Hilary, after deliberately pondering this statement. "I congratulate you."

"Why?" she asked, with a perceptible start. Congratulations, in her mind, were indelibly associated with one particular meaning.

"On cornering me with a brilliant repartee."

"Oh, I thought you meant —"

"What did you think I meant?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"No; I hadn't heard any report," said Hilary, "that you had decided to put anyone out of his misery."

"Oh, don't be idiotic!" cried Jean. But she smiled and blushed a little, and looked by no means displeased.

At the end of the nominal ten minutes, which had expanded to fifteen, he got up again.

"Now it's really good-bye," he said, "till the day after to-morrow, or perhaps the day after that. Shake hands."

She gave him her hand. It felt soft and cool and tempting, and on a sudden impulse he raised it to his lips.

She withdrew it quickly. "I think you forget," she said.

The trite sentence came from her lips with quiet dignity, and her eyes shone steadily with astonished resentment.

The indignant poise of her head and her stately attitude, as she stood confronting him, showed her beauty to Hilary in a new phase. He would have

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liked to have kept her so for a while. But his recovered instinct told him that he had acted unjustifiably.

"Do forgive me," he said humbly. "I ought not to have done it, I know. It was impulsive, but I meant it for a mark of respect — truly," he said appealingly.

After still a slight hesitation, she smiled her forgiveness; and then he opened the door and went out to Deloraine's room.

"You spend too much time with Jean, Hilary," she said to him as soon as he came in.

"Oh, well," said he, "she's very human."

"You know you can't really be interested in her."

"No; but she's so good-looking, and she says such deliciously silly things in such a deliciously silly way."

"It's not fair to her."

Hilary lighted a cigarette and sat down before the fire. He took several whiffs before he replied.

"Well, why shouldn't I behave conventionally?" he said.

"Marry her?"

"Yes."

"*Marry her?*"

"Yes. Why be so astonished, Deloraine? I suppose some time I must marry. It really doesn't matter who it is, as long as I can feel comfortable with her. You know I can never be drawn pro-

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foundly to anyone — he looked at her — “else.”

Deloraine dropped her eyes, and her bosom moved with sudden emotion. She had not been jealous; she had believed in him steadfastly. Nevertheless, at this confirmation of her belief — uttered with the sense of a simple and permanent truism — she thrilled with grateful, tumultuous, triumphant joy; and once more she was caught in the strenuous lines of battle with herself. All her being called upon her to give herself into his arms, to reward his un-recompensed loyalty and love with a surrender whose straining claim sang through her veins — beat with a fierceness of demand which could fling her into moments of resentful rebellion against her womanhood.

After a time she controlled herself sufficiently to speak.

“Even granting the premise, Jean is the last wife in the world for you.”

“Well, but why?” He had turned his face from her and had been looking into the fire during the time that she was silent. “She would always look well, and one would be glad to have the means and the right to supply her with ornaments and things to wear, when they would be worn so effectively. And she would be cheerful, and soothing, and delicious, and — oh — well, I think her husband would be in clover.”

“You don’t understand her in the least, Hilary;

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and I am not sure that you understand yourself. You are not in love, and yet you feel you must marry. Why should you feel that?"

"It seems to be a part of one's natural heritage," said Hilary; "a joy — or, at the lowest, an experience — to which we are entitled. To go through life without having married would seem to be to reject deliberately what must surely be an essential purpose of our existence." He turned to her and added, with a slightly indicated interrogative: "I have not parted with my right to marry."

"Not to me; but in justice to yourself and to the woman, whoever she may be, I think you have."

"But why shouldn't it be possible for one to be quietly, unemotionally happy — at least, comfortable? After all, though one sees a good many people during the day, and has a good many interests and sympathies, a bachelor's life is lonely at the bottom. It seems to me that, when one had been worried at the office, or had got stuck up with a piece of writing, it would be delightful to have someone to chaff and toy with and be kind to and flatter and tease — someone who would make no intellectual exaction."

"Every word you utter," said Deloraine, "shows you more stridently out of tune with the right conception of marriage. You don't know it, but you are evidencing a state of mind which makes a man want a mistress, not a wife. For the trifling reasons you have given, you are suggesting, not a contract for a fortnight, a month, a year, but an im-

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mutable lifelong union. Marriage is not a pastime. It is a perfect affinity, a natural fusion of the whole essence of two beings. If there is simply the form and not that fusion, disaster, unhappiness, breach — one or all — must inevitably follow.”

“Oh, why do you talk like that?” cried Hilary, almost fiercely. He sprang from his seat. “You know that for me there exists that fusion in supreme possibility, if not, in some sense, in present actuality. But because it cannot be soldered in full realization, I am trying to make the best of the inevitable; I am trying to make my mind peacefully accept an inferior condition of life, knowing it to be inferior. Oh, I know what marriage might be, could be, *would* be.”

He had come close to her and was looking down at her tempestuously, held in check by the stringently exerted claim of his loyalty to the weakness she had given into his trust.

She looked up straight into his face, her eyes shining with a steady, introspective glow. She had been confronted, in a vivid moment, with an aspect of her relations with him which had never appealed to her before with such arresting force. “I have spoiled your life,” she said.

“No; you have made it.” He spoke with low concentration. “But for you, I should still be trudging through existence at Cubitt’s.”

His eyes continued to be bent upon hers; hers lifted to his. Incontrollable love had somehow got

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through, and was burning in each of them. A pregnant movement, a half-word of the emotions stirring them, and their eager lips must have rushed together irresistibly. But neither spoke anything but by their eyes; and after a few straining moments Hilary went back to the fireplace.

"And probably becoming more soured and cynical every day," he added to the sentence spoken several seconds before.

"I didn't judge you fairly," Deloraine said, after a pause. Then she asked: "Do you wish for children?"

"I don't *wish* for them," Hilary replied. "The temperamental condition which wishes for children is inconceivable to me. I think I could be fond of them, if I had them. I'm fond of all small things. When a fluffy little Persian kitten lies in my arms and purrs, I feel I would die rather than let it be harmed. There is something so appealing in its exquisite confidence."

"Perhaps marriage would be best for you," said Deloraine, after a moment's hesitation, and without looking at him; "but not with Jean."

In adding the last words she knew she was opposing her personal interest. If Hilary made a matrimonial experiment, she would not, in any case, allow a position to continue which might interfere with its chance of success; but the separation in form would with far greater probability become a separation in reality if he married sympathetically — or,

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at least, with the possibility of mutual sympathy. Jean, at the best, could never be more than a plaything; but a woman who could enter into his intellectual life and understand his aims and the restless impulses of his spirit, might, and probably would, slowly wean him from his allegiance to herself.

He turned his face to her suddenly, as he stood by the fire. "Tell me not to marry, and I won't."

It was scarcely a fair appeal. He was deliberately putting to her a choice, pressing her to an issue. He saw her tremble, but he waited for her reply. She had dropped her hands and was twisting the rings on her fingers.

At last she looked up and met his eyes calmly and steadily. "No, I won't be a judge, Hilary; but I will be a counsellor. I will tell you a true story about marriage — a very short one. At this moment I would give every penny I have in the world to be free."

CHAPTER IX

DELORAINÉ knew that it was in her power to prevent the catastrophe upon which, since her conversation with Hilary, she came more and more to feel that these two people were rushing. In calm blood, with her intellect clear, she could put steadily away from her the straining desire to ignore her marriage; but, for the first time since her difficulties with her husband culminated, she took into serious view the wretched business of public divorce. In her case, she knew the publicity would be aggravated to its utmost distasteful proportions. She saw the big headlines in the newspapers, she saw the packed court, the besieged doors, herself in the witness-box, the crowded benches of reporters and sketch-artists, describing minutely, with pen and pencil, her face, her dress, her expression. If the case were defended, she saw, too, the relentless personal cross-examination about Hilary, and her discharged servants tracked and brought into court to relate sensationally coloured accounts of his visits.

All that, obnoxious as it would be, she thought she could bring herself to face. But she was sufficiently well acquainted with the laws of her country to feel very dubious of the adequacy of her cause. Her husband had never offered her physical violence;

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and their separation was not due to his desertion of her, but rather to her desertion of him, in consequence of his flagrant and heartless breach of a trust. She had little doubt that he would show the utmost willingness, if the opportunity were given him, to hang his hat in her hall, and even light-heartedly to resume a connubial relation, whenever financial or other considerations suggested the expediency of temporary retirement from more frivolous occupations.

After pondering the matter for two or three days, she decided to put it to the touch. She wrote to him. It was a test-letter, asking him to come and see her. She hoped fervently, almost with a pain of hope, that he would ignore it — that he would refuse to come.

But he did not refuse. At three o'clock on the day appointed he walked serenely into her study, fashionable, debonair, confident. She had heard his ring and was prepared. The knowledge of his possible visit had prevented her working that afternoon, but when he entered the room he found her seated at her desk, buttressed by heavy piles of books and papers. She was quietly writing.

She did not rise or offer him her hand. For a moment she looked at him without speaking, and then said quite calmly:

"It is good of you to come. I hope it wasn't a trouble to you. I shan't keep you long."

He stood in front of the fire, his feet slightly

apart, and locked his hands in the small of his back, throwing his shoulders back. "But, my dear Deloraine," he protested, "this is not a very torrid opening to what I hoped was to be a happy reunion — a blowing away of unfortunate clouds and misunderstandings."

"There are clouds that are rather too heavy to be blown away," she replied. "No doubt by this time you have forgotten Pearl Carbis. For my part, I feel my responsibility for what has happened to her too deeply for it to be possible for me to forget her."

For a fraction of a second Randolph Wynne blushed — really blushed. "I am willing to admit," he said, "that that particular incident — you have lighted on the worst — does not redound to my credit. I could have wished that it had turned out differently. Not that there were no extenuating circumstances: you almost encouraged me to flirt with her."

"It was not the slight to myself. Possibly I could have forgiven that in time. It was your callous destruction of a young girl for whom I had become responsible, and with whom I trusted you."

"Well, I have frankly accepted my blame," he said easily, "and I now express my sorrow. It was an unfortunate and not altogether a creditable page in the history of anyone concerned. Possibly you may be justified in attributing to me the chief malfeasance. My shoulders are wide, and I am willing

to bear it. But you have said that you do not entirely excuse yourself; the girl and her mother were not in a position to claim complete immunity from the reckoning; and certainly no one could exonerate her blundering husband. At any rate," he concluded, "it is an old story by this time. It all ended long ago."

"Not only did it not end long ago," said Deloraine, "but it has not ended yet. Do you know where Pearl is living now?"

"No."

"Well, *I* do. Do you know what she is doing?"

"No."

"Well, *I* do. Do you know what her health is like?"

"No."

"Well, *I* do. It has been steadily weakening since you broke her heart. I fear that the end of which you speak so glibly may be a tragedy still deeper than any for which your treatment of her has yet been responsible."

"I'm sorry," said Wynne, obviously without much feeling. "What can I do? I was prepared to make substantial provision for her, but she refused it."

"How were you in a position to do that?" asked Deloraine quietly.

Again, for a moment, he was touched to a shade of abashment.

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"You would have used your wife's money," she flashed suddenly, her whole frame expanding, "to console your discarded mistress!"

Quickly recovering his confidence, he sank easily into a chair and quietly crossed his legs.

"You are determined to be quite brutally frank," he said. "Why did you ask me to come?"

Leaning an elbow on her desk, she examined him calmly and deliberately.

"I am going to take steps to divorce you," she said.

"And you have sent for me to tell me the good news?" he asked lightly. "That is very thoughtful of you."

"I am glad you consider it good news," she said.

"And may I be curious enough to ask why?"

"Because it will simplify matters for both of us if the suit is undefended."

There was the slightest note of eagerness in her tone (she had scarcely dared to hope that he would be so easy to deal with), and he was quick to perceive a means of possible profit, and one of revenging himself for her taunts, which had gone deeper than he had permitted to appear.

He reversed his legs and smiled amiably. "I am afraid you underestimate the sincerity of my attachment," he said, "if you can take my jokes so seriously. Now let us look the facts in the face. Perhaps I have taken an unwarrantable length of

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rope, but I appreciate my matrimonial fortune; and what grounds have you for depriving me of it?"

Deloraine saw that she had revealed her anxiety, and that he was proposing to himself to force terms upon her. "I have two," she replied, with an assumption of confidence — "your unfaithfulness and your desertion."

Randolph Wynne, in the character of a long-suffering husband, turned upon her a deeply expostulatory face. "Now I heartily protest," he said, "against a too flagrant injustice. Here am I this afternoon, faithfully in attendance, in obedience to your lightest call; and you say I have deserted you! Here have I been these last two or three years, eager for the society that has been denied me, eager to enter the doors that have been shut in my face; and you say I have deserted you!"

"I could never submit to your society after the affair with Pearl," she said calmly.

Suddenly he dropped his light manner and became serious. "You are logical enough to know that that won't do, Deloraine. You wish for a divorce, but you have no legal grounds for it. I am the one person in the world who can supply you with grounds, and your means to obtain them are neither bluff nor abuse."

"Possibly I can guess the means," said Deloraine, with a note of contempt.

"Very well. At least we have done with hypoc-

ris. I am prepared to disobey an order for restitution. But, in my present impoverished condition, my marriage to you is one of the few assets I can lay claim to, and I cannot afford to dispose of it gratuitously. Had Providence seen fit to deal with me more generously, I should have been only too happy to present it to you in simple good-will."

"Yes; we have certainly done with hypocrisy," said Deloraine pregnantly.

"You are avoiding the point."

"So far from that, I am trying to bring myself to credit that you are deliberately in earnest. You suggest, do you, that we should enter into collusion, that I should buy you off and go to the court with a false petition?"

"Oh dear, no," he said lightly; "it doesn't amount to that. It is done every day. It is a more or less recognised fiction to escape the complexities of the law."

"I congratulate you on your knowledge of legal practice; I cannot do the same upon your intimacy with the quarter from which you must have derived it."

This was such a remark as had led Wynne many times to confess that his distinguished wife "did get deucedly on my nerves." Flashes of anger, violent temper, he could have rolled aside with enjoyment; but such dry scorn whipped even his studied imperturbability into unseen ferment. He had always controlled it, however, on the surface; and to-day,

with a great *coup* depending possibly on cool management, he had exceptional reason for maintaining his composure.

"You don't realise, do you," he said blandly, "when you use that righteously scornful tone, that your own position is by no means irreproachable? Unless you seriously wish for a reconciliation you are acting altogether irregularly in asking me to come and see you. What can I suppose except that you wish to come to some arrangement?"

"I wish a divorce," said Deloraine, slightly startled by a view of the matter which had not hitherto appealed to her.

"But not to pay for it?"

"I wish for it honestly. I am entitled to a divorce from a man who has behaved as you have behaved."

"It is merely a question of opening your cheque-book."

Deloraine hesitated. Should she ask him his terms? It was a sharp temptation. Hilary's happiness and hers for a draft on her bank! She knew Wynne would ask an enormous sum — not less than five thousand pounds. It was not that which troubled her; she would willingly have paid it for her freedom, if she could have obtained it honestly. But she could not go to the court with a lie upon her lips; she could not hold hands with deceit.

"I cannot pay you," she said, quietly but inflexibly.

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He drew himself together with a slight suggestion of surprised pity, got up and, without uttering a word, walked to the door. It was a ruse he had employed before in similar circumstances, and frequently he had been recalled. He was recalled to-day, but with a different purpose than he had expected.

"Stay just a moment." She lowered herself to make an appeal to him. "I do wish for a divorce, Randolph; you were right in assuming it; I wish for it very much. You can never obtain more money from me. What pleasure can it give to you to make me miserable? You have no love for me: you don't wish for me. Your freedom could not be irksome to you. You would not be asked to appear in court or to put yourself to any personal inconvenience. Won't you show me some generosity? I did not treat you ungenerously while you remained faithful to me."

He had stopped in the middle of the room. "Why are you so curiously anxious for a divorce?" he asked, with slow incision. He saw that the prize he had been playing for was lost, and, so far from being inclined to generosity, he intended to let his tongue loose.

Deloraine had been prepared for the question at some point in the interview; but its brutally insinuating utterance betrayed her into a faint flush of colour.

"Yes! oh!" said Wynne, with a drawling sug-

gestion of prescience. "It's that young Thornton. I've been told you've had him hanging about you a good deal. What on earth can you see in a man of that type?"

Deloraine stared at him in ominous stillness.

"Oh, it has come to an affair already, has it?" he had the hardihood to continue. "Well, I think you've shown indifferent judgment, Deloraine. I should have thought you would have looked upon your good name as the more valuable property of the two."

She sprang from her seat, her eyes blazing — all the tumultuous passion of her nature aroused to implacable expression. "Leave my house! And never — *never* — enter it again."

The look on her face was such that even Randolph Wynne did not venture to disregard it.

He affected an amused laugh, picked up his hat, and strolled out of the room with elaborate unconcern.

CHAPTER X

WHEN Hilary had suggested the possibility of marriage with Jean, he had spoken without premeditation; but having viewed it then as a concrete question, it was almost inevitable that it should be constantly in his mind when he saw her afterwards. Even yet he only recognised it as a remote and rather fantastic vision; but it seemed to him, when he surveyed her graceful figure in some tender-hued and tenderly fitting fabric, that it would be an enviable thing to have the right to kiss those lips and to clothe that form. A man who could possess all that delectable beauty at will — who had an absolute right over it, without reservation — would surely want little of an earthly paradise; he would surely not be tempted to burn incense to strange gods. And the more he saw of Jean, the more he came to feel that it was his for the asking — his for the asking, at a price.

In thinking in this way he was perfectly aware that he was allowing his senses to dominate his intellect. Ideas of "right" and "possession" in regard to women were fiercely opposed to his most cherished tenets; and, in permitting himself to dwell

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upon them, he was committing, according to his views, an iniquity in thought — he was consciously sinning. He was projecting himself into a position of viewing his wife with the proprietary sense with which an Eastern potentate might view his seraglio. And the very fact that he was deriving unholy pleasure from the conception of his personal exercise of a dominant right, and from the knowledge that he would be secured in his privilege, confirmed him in the conviction of the impropriety of a system which embraced the principle of property in women.

But there were other times when he was governed by his intellect, and when he looked prudence in the face. He saw the long years ahead and the time when her beauty would have faded. And he looked honestly into his own nature and asked himself what kind of a time a woman of whom he had tired would be likely to have. He saw his tense nerves and his quick temper, and his hatred of prejudice, and his impatiencē with a mind which could not guide itself and ran in a prepared groove.

And then, at yet other times, when he was talking to her, when he listened to the soft inflections of her voice and was stirred to strange delight by her air, which had become of late more subdued and more conscious, he asked himself why he should grow tired. He placed his expectations on no fanciful pinnacle. He knew her qualities and her limitations; and when she was old, he would be old too.

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She would fill the side of his life which at present was empty, and he looked for no more in her. Why should he tire?

Such cogitations were passing through his mind, by no means for the first time, one night while he was sitting with her in the drawing-room. He had dined in Pont Street, and Deloraine had gone to her study for a time.

"I like that frock, Jean," he said, after a short period of silence. He had been permitted to call her "Jean" for a week.

"Yes; you said so the last time I wore it. That's why I put it on."

"How sweet of you!" He moved from his chair and took one nearer to her. "We've got to be delightfully good sort of friends since you came here, haven't we?" He swung a knee between his hands. "I should miss you horribly if you went away."

"Would you?" She was leaning forward in her chair, with her hands lightly folded, looking into the fire.

He perceived that he was getting rather too near the brink of a declaration. He edged away a little. "How are you getting on with the typewriting and the work generally? It's going to last, is it? I hope so."

"Yes, I think so. I'm still a shocking dunce, but Deloraine isn't too — too —"

"Exacting?"

"Yes."

"And you are glad, are you?"

"Glad for what?"

"That it's likely to last."

"Oh, yes. I love London."

An irretrievable note of sentiment had got into the conversation. Not a sound anywhere in the house or in the street struck a discord with their two voices, pitched in a low key; and in the silences they felt the presence of one another and listened to the fire flickering. They both were conscious that the fire flickered audibly.

"Do you remember," he said, dropping his knee, and leaning his elbow on the arm of his chair and his chin on the hand, so that his face was close to her fair, white shoulder — "do you remember, some time in the spring, soon after you came, singing to me one afternoon?"

"Yes," she answered. "We had been talking about — cinematographs?"

"No; panoramas."

"Oh yes — and other things."

"Do you remember what you sang?"

"Yes — I think so." There was a catch in her voice.

"Will you sing it again?"

She got up. "It's rather sentimental. Oh!" — suddenly — "I don't think I can!"

He rose, too, quickly. "Yes; but I feel — I feel —"

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The blood was rushing in his veins, flooding to his head. She was standing quite close to him, and he felt overpoweringly impelled to touch her — to hold her. After all, a man didn't marry for intellectual companionship; he could get that without. It would be heaven to feel her in his arms. He *knew* she would let him. She was coming across to him now — oh, how she was coming across! A word, and he would clasp her — throbbing, yielding; and almost before he knew it the word had been spoken.

“Jean, you darling, I want you so!”

He had caught her. He held her in ecstatic silence from moment to moment. Her head was on his shoulder. . . . “Oh, Hilary, I thought you never, *never* would.”

Jean had escaped in confusion as Deloraine came in. She stood astonished and still in the middle of the room.

“Hilary! Hilary!”

Reproach, dismay, appeal rang in the clear repetition.

He felt suddenly miserably ashamed of himself. “Oh, it was no good shivering on the brink,” he said.

“Your nature and hers! Have you thought? Have you thought at all?”

“Yes; I've thought till I'm ill with thinking.”

“You don't love her?”

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"Of course I don't love her! How could I love her?"

Deloraine still stood in the middle of the room, her bosom rising and falling slowly.

"It's almost a crime," she said steadily.

"But why shouldn't I have her?" he flashed out with defensive fierceness. "Why shouldn't I, Deloraine? I want her — I want her horribly. I'm prepared to tend her, to cherish her, to keep her, to care for her."

She came farther into the room and sat down. "I'm not cynical," she said, "but you are prepared to do that for a month."

"Then you *are* cynical." He went across to her. "Deloraine, do wish me good luck — you!"

"I do wish it — with all my heart." There was just a break in the middle.

"May I sit down and talk to you?"

She hesitated.

"May I, Deloraine?"

"Yes . . . but not after to-night."

CHAPTER XI

JEAN'S wedding was not a quiet affair. From the time she went back to her home in Worcestershire to the fluttering date, three months later, all was delicious excitement, a delicious fever of expectation and preparation. There were pleasant shoals of letters to answer — gushing letters, earnest letters, conventional letters, covertly spiteful letters (the most delightful of all). There were gowns to be discussed and discussed again; there was the unceasing question of whom to invite and whom to leave out — you *must* have a limit — and there was the final decision to be reached — it had to be final some time — about the number and the choice of the bridesmaids and what they were to wear. Then Hilary had to be taken round and exhibited; then the presents began to come in; and then, at last, came the great day itself.

To this ceremony — not to marriage, but to the ceremony — Jean had looked forward ever since she could think. Then she would be the admired and extolled central figure of a brilliant concourse — the retreating, happy cynosure of hundreds of eyes. To have signed her name in a registry-office or before two unbedecked witnesses in the vestry of a church,

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would have appeared to her a deprivation of her birthright.

The ceremony, indeed, assumed fantastic disproportion in her mind; it overwhelmed and obliterated the profound change upon which she was advancing. And no wonder! The wedding is the woman's day — spectacular, decorated, trimmed for effect. She gets the limelight. For once the man is nowhere. Later on — especially if Hilary became famous, as she was sure he would — she would be just his wife, an ornamental appendage which a man has attached to him; but on the day of days she was **THE BRIDE**.

All this parade of preparation, leading steadily to an elaborately ceremonious climax, produced in Hilary a curious sense of being carefully bound to his bargain with cords and increasing cords. This was what he was paying for a kiss. Not that he could have said that he did not wish to pay it. When he had yielded to his impulse to clasp Jean, the thought of marriage had been in his mind; but if she had assumed it to be a kiss pure and simple, he might have let it go as such. She had assumed it, however, to be an offer of marriage; and he carried it as such unwaveringly to fulfilment.

His state of mind during this period was a still, almost stagnant, calm. He was not deliriously happy, but he was not unhappy. He watched the preparations, it seemed to him, and even went through the ceremony, more as an interested spectator than as one vitally concerned.

He felt he could have reached a condition of satisfying happiness in the prospect before him if the attitude of Deloraine had been different. When the thought of marriage with Jean had first come into his mind, he had imagined vaguely, with masculine lack of subtlety, that it would mean physical and domestic union with her, coupled with the uninterrupted course of his intellectual and spiritual intimacy with Deloraine. Looking at the matter always from his own point of view, such a triple alliance had seemed to him very possible and delightful and mutually sufficing. Deloraine, more finely perceptive, saw clearly that there was only one line of her future conduct which was consistent with justice to Jean and to herself; to hold quietly aloof, to strangle the cry of her heart, to beat down beneath level snow the tumultuous fevers that tore through her, firmly to turn over the page of her life which contained Hilary.

She sent Jean a beautiful diamond brooch soon after she left her, and that was the only sign of interest in, or even knowledge of, the approaching function which she gave. Jean was keenly disappointed that she did not come to the wedding. The presence of her distinguished relative would have given éclat to the proceedings and have added lustre to her principal rôle. The affair would have been more prominently reported in the London fashion papers. To the last she hoped that she might have some surprise in view — that she would enter as the grand

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and beautiful fairy at some unexpected and theatrical moment. But she did not come; and Jean gave secret rein, in consolation, to an explanation which was satisfactory to herself but very unjust to Deloraine.

Hilary's concern was duller and deeper. He did not expect her active, overt countenance, but he had hoped for the undercurrent of her sympathy. Ever since the night of his *rapprochement* with Jean their old relations had come to an end. He had ceased to be on terms of informal intimacy at her house, had been relegated to a level position among her many friends. She recognised him courteously and kindly when they met, but their meetings were rare and fortuitous; there were no more delightful, familiar talks. It surprised him to find how quietly and easily she had changed, what little effect his elimination appeared to have upon her. The regular tenor of her life proceeded as usual. He read reports of her presiding at meetings and attending receptions; he saw her articles in the reviews and references to her activity in the daily press. Nothing had altered in her world; only he had gone out of it.

He did not see her before he went to Worcestershire for the wedding. He wrote to tell her he was going, and she acknowledged the letter but did not ask him to come and see her. Again and again during the ceremony, and after, his thoughts turned to her. How cold she was! This was his wedding-day, and she had sent no message — she who had

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made him, who had done more for him than anyone who had ever lived — even his own mother. Did she remember?

Did she remember? When he was dressed for the journey and was running quickly down the steps of the house, between files of guests armed with bags of confetti, to join Jean in the carriage, a belated telegram was handed to him. He opened it at the door of the brougham:

“GOD BLESS YOU.”

That was all. There was no signature. Voices filled his ears; the horses started quickly with a clatter; confetti spattered on the sides of the carriage. He thrust his handkerchief into Jean's hands. “Wave, Jean, wave!”

And Jean waved.

CHAPTER XII

THE pale lavender walls and the purple draperies and chair-covers in the dining-room of Jean's flat were beginning to lose their first freshness. Her first pride and interest in them, too, were beginning to evaporate. They had ceased to be things of wonder and joy, which it was a pleasure merely to sit amidst and realize, and had fallen into line among the commonplaces of existence. She had been married in April — it was now July — and her soul cried out for more excitement. After such a deliriously moving time it was a chilling business to settle down steadily to uneventful life. She had the feeling that, though she was only twenty-five, her day was past: the great moments of a woman's life had gone over her. Other girls would be married, and would have the fêting and the flowers and the muslins, and the sheen and perfume of a great occasion, and she would be merely a spectator, and no longer one who looked forward with fluttering, delicious hope, but who looked back to a sweet page irrevocably turned. How quickly the world moved on!

She sat down with a little sigh to the breakfast table. There was the smallest sign of haste and carelessness in the arrangement of her hair, just a hint of slovenliness about her morning blouse. You

missed the pearly perfection of the days in Pont Street. It would return in the afternoon, when she had dressed to go out or to receive possible visitors. This morning no one but Hilary was likely to see her: it did not matter.

She lifted the coffee-pot and filled her cup. At one time she had handled even the spoons and forks with acute joy of ownership — almost with incredulity of ownership. They were like fairy spoons and forks. Now the dainty magic had left them, and they were simply the utilitarian articles to which she had been accustomed.

There was a pile of letters by Hilary's plate; there were none for her. Of course, he was late; she had ceased expecting him to be punctual. He worked late and rose late. It seemed to her that writers and journalists were difficult husbands. Their hours were erratic, and they were always in the clouds and would not attend to and talk about interesting things in an interesting way.

On the whole she thought she was a little disappointed with marriage. She had heard and read the cynical things that many people said about it, but it had seemed that in her case it must necessarily be different. She knew she was pretty and attractive to men and that they liked to be with her, and she had thought she would always be played with and listened to and teased and petted and flattered. Such things had grown up with her as part of her natural heritage, and it was difficult to conceive a

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man who would not appreciate the constant liberty to accord them. Since they came back from the honeymoon, Hilary had begun to think continually of things with which she had no concern. They were very dull things, and she could not pretend to feel an interest in them, or if she did for a little while, he always saw through the pretence and was annoyed with her for being bored. Lately he had ceased to mention them to her, but he was often abrupt and irritable.

And then she didn't think she liked the extension of endearment which marriage involved. Of course, she was not silly, but it seemed to her it was somehow a pity. It made a sunny ripple into a troublesome tempest, and then into a stagnant calm. Sometimes, late at night, Hilary became deliciously tender and sweet. She enjoyed it and nestled up to him — it was lovely to be petted — and then she found out what it meant, and that rather spoiled it. If ever it did not mean that, she was glad. She could not have expressed it, but she thought that the ideal life would be the conditions of betrothal with the accoutrements of marriage. It would be delightful to have her own flat and furniture and her own servants and the prestige of a wife and the freedom which a wedding-ring gives, and to have the fondness without the intimacies. She wondered sometimes why it couldn't be so. Why couldn't engagement be turned into marriage without this plunge into unmentionable things?

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She had poured herself a second cup of coffee, when Hilary came briskly into the room.

"I've nearly finished," she said. "I wish you would sometimes try to get up in time, Hilary. Everything must be cold."

"Well, it's my own look-out," he answered lightly; "I'm the only sufferer. If it happens to be an idiosyncrasy of mine to have cold breakfasts, you've no need to complain. How's the headache?"

He had been asleep while she was dressing, but he considered that they had already met and did not kiss her.

"What headache?" she asked.

"I thought you had one last night."

"It wasn't a headache," said Jean. "I was rather giddy."

"Oh yes — giddy." He was opening an envelope. "How's the giddiness?"

"It's better, but I don't feel quite right. I haven't done for the last two or three days. I don't think London in July suits me."

He made no reply; he was reading a letter.

"You're not attending," cried Jean sharply. "You didn't hear what I said."

"No — I'm awfully sorry — I didn't," after a pause, during which he had finished the letter. He looked up with a propitiatory smile. "What was it?"

"I said I didn't think London suited me in July."

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"It doesn't suit anybody." He took up another envelope.

"Couldn't we manage to get away soon?"

He was again reading a letter. His brow creased into furrows over it with a worried look.

"Couldn't we, don't you think, Hilary?"

"Oh, lor — *what?*" He threw down the letter and stared across at her.

Tears came into her eyes. "Never mind."

"Yes, yes," he said in a softer tone; "let's have it out." He was feeling a little compunctious.

"I only said, couldn't we manage to get away? It would be lovely at Trouville, or even at Cromer. My frocks are getting grimy already. Besides, there's no one left in London to see them. It's like being in a ballroom when everyone has gone away."

"It's out of the question. Napier doesn't get back till the 10th of August, and I can't go before. Now, don't talk any more till I've read these letters, there's a good girl."

She sat in fretful silence while he hurriedly got through the remainder of his correspondence and his breakfast. He ate abstractedly, evidently scarcely conscious what he was putting into his mouth. Suddenly he picked up the bundle of papers, and, leaving his plate half full, turned his chair to a desk behind him. Almost in the same movement he snatched a pen and a sheet of paper and headed a letter; then, after a second's pause, he rose with a worried excla-

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mation and began to pace the room with his hands in his pockets.

"What are you bothering about?" asked Jean, a little impatiently. He touched her dress every time he passed her in the small space unoccupied by furniture. "The carpet is getting worn already round the table where you have walked. And I think you might remember that I am not very well to-day. I think it's your restlessness that makes me giddy."

"You said just now it was London in July."

"Perhaps it's both. Can't you sit down?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because I'm bothered. I want to think."

"What about?"

"It's no use telling you; you wouldn't understand."

"Oh, of course you are very clever!" she said a little sarcastically.

"The trouble is that I'm not clever enough. I look like getting worsted by a publisher again."

"Have you heard from him?"

"Oh no! It's a sort of intuition."

She missed the sarcasm. "How do you mean an intuition?"

He stopped suddenly and looked at her. "Well, look here! Supposing you were offered fifteen and you thought you ought to be able to get twenty-five, what would you do? Would you stick to your guns, or would you compromise?"

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"Are you talking about royalties?" She had found out what a royalty was.

"Of course."

"I should take the twenty-five," she replied without hesitation.

"But that's only hypothetical."

"What's hypothetical?"

"Oh, get on with your knitting!" He turned away.

"I *never* knit," she said, bridling sharply.

"How can you say such a thing?"

"Well, go and talk to the cook."

"I don't *talk* to the cook," she returned, with the same trivial hauteur. "I order the meals."

"It's the same thing."

"It's not."

"You are a little ass!" he said and sat down again at the desk.

Before he had finished his letter he had regretted that remark. He always regretted speaking harshly to her. Though she irritated him inexpressibly, he knew it was not by her intentional act, but through the involuntary revealment of her circumscribed outlook. Deep within him was a desire to say something kind and gentle, but he could not say it. It would have involved constraint, fussing, perhaps a scene. Jean was superficially emotional, as she was superficially attractive. It had become habitual with him to meet her puerilities with a sharp note, and reversion to his prenuptial manner would have

touched the crude strings of her temperament into hurried agitation; and that would have jarred on his sense of proportion at the moment, and have become foolish in the retrospect from some subsequent inevitable asperity. He saw himself a bear, and hated himself for it, but submitted to it.

That morning, however, when he had secured his line of retreat, he made an approach to the *amende honorable*.

"I'm sorry I spoke as I did. Will you forgive me?" he said all in a breath, as he was leaving the flat for the office.

Then he brushed her cheek with his lips, and escaped quickly down the steps before she could become emotional.

CHAPTER XIII

THEY went to Trouville and returned. During the short holiday at the French watering-place they lived on the surface of things. Hilary deliberately gave himself up to light, thoughtless frivolity, bringing himself into line with his wife, and for the time the fundamental disparity of their natures was obscured. Jean thought happily that the little jagged rocks had been passed, and that henceforth their lives would flow together along a soft stream of joyous colour. Hilary knew better. He knew, while he was indulging a capacity for artificial enjoyment, that he could not permanently lead such a life and be true to himself, even if practical necessities permitted it. But in the bright atmosphere, the passing brilliancy, the universal pervading spirit to live in the moment, he contrived to smother his inner perception; and for the short period of the visit to Trouville in a way he was happy — happier than he had been at any time during his marriage.

He returned to London with the sense that autumn brings of things past — of fading beauty, of closing life, of melancholy. He resumed harness, and with it conditions of thought and of habit natural to him. The routine was inexorable. Trait by trait, a little more every day and every week, it

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brought into prominence the essential, ineradicable antipathies between himself and Jean. And they did not remain now as little rocks; they swelled steadily to their full proportions of giant, enduring boulders. Slowly and relentlessly there pressed upon Hilary the suffocating knowledge that he had married, bound to himself for life, a woman who could never be as much to him even as one of the wives of a Turk's seraglio.

Perhaps if he had looked into his heart he would have known that the Oriental condition was the utmost he had hoped for. He had realized that Jean had no profundity in her mind or in her soul, but he had imagined that at least he would find her an exuberant mate on the physical plane. That showed him to be depending upon a wholly imaginary inconsistency in the foundations of individual character. Shallows are all shallow and deeps are all deep. Large-souled women are large-sensed women. The courtesan has no essential capacity of passion in her nature; she is actuated either by a hectic taste for superficial gaiety or by the necessity to provide the wherewithal of life, or by both. Hilary found Jean deficient even in the quality he had expected. Not even her senses were deep; she was shallow all through. He had lost everywhere.

The perception of the doom he had hung about his neck, the long hopelessness, the grim rejection of the instinctive claim for alleviation, struck at the root of his moral fibre. He sank into periods of his

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old lethargy — but heavier and more conscious — and broke out in paroxysms of recklessness, of desperate casting of restraints. What — he asked himself — could a man so clogged make of life? There was no subject, however casual, which could be opened in domestic intercourse, but would immediately reveal some point of essential disharmony. Now that they were germane to his life, he could no longer glide over Jean's ineptitudes with the careless acceptance of earlier days. Her false standards, her serene assumption of results and flagrant incapacity to appreciate causes, her trivial channels and processes of thought, her complacency and insensibility, blew him steadily to a furnace-glow of suppressed exasperation. Sometimes he let the choked fires loose in volcanic flames of derision, which brought hot tears to Jean's eyes but did not open her understanding. And after each outbreak, bitterly conscious of the draft from his self-respect, he withdrew into his shell and hated himself with a consuming hatred.

In time — illogically, but inevitably — he grew to hate her too, to resent the sight of her. Her presence was a continual reminder of his least creditable moments. He made excuses to avoid passing his time with her; he walked hours in the Park, in the streets — anywhere — to keep himself from the presence of the woman who knew him as a savage, and whose character he despised. Such times as he saw her lightly dispensing tea to her friends were to

him times of acute nervous suffering. So far from realizing those exquisite connubial moments, when the accidental clash of a husband's and wife's eyes in the company of others tells mutual delicious secrets, he shunned her glance with nerves intensely strung by the fear of inadvertent meeting.

During all this time Deloraine had maintained her attitude of benevolent detachment. They met her rarely, and when they did, were not distinguished from her other friends; her smile contained no invitation to return to earlier intimacies. She had once been to the flat, and once only, and that at a time when Hilary was absent. Jean continued to put her own construction upon this reserve, and though she lamented that her visitors' list was deprived of a celebrity, she secretly preened her feathers. To Hilary it brought a far more poignant pain. He pined for the old comradeship. He felt miserably adrift without it, like a ship whose pilot, after bringing it to the wild sweep of the open sea, had slipped away. Until Deloraine had become lost to him, he did not realize how much he had depended on her, how much she stood for in his life. Her calm, kindly words and gracious manner at their short and infrequent meetings went through him like a knife.

He was always looking for her: during his solitary, feverish walks, at literary gatherings, at the houses of mutual friends, his eyes searched for her perpetually. Sometimes he walked to Pont Street and stood at a few hundred yards from the house —

never nearer — watching, in the distant hope that she might come out, that he might see the sheen of her dress at a window. He waited always until people began to stare at him, and then moved away. If by chance he caught a glimpse of her at some literary function or in any crowd, his whole being thrilled, and he was conscious of nothing but her presence while she remained; and if she went away, he knew it without looking round. When he turned, as he always did, to prove the truth of the intuition that had come to him, his heart felt that no void in the world could be more complete than the utter blankness of the place which she had occupied.

Since he returned from Trouville he had not even seen her. He feared she had gone away — that she was at West Drewton — and the thought sent him with a rush of yearning back to the old days in Hull — to those successive Sundays when she had taught him to know himself, to believe in himself, and to put his shoulder against the wheel. And then one day, at a moment when, for once, he was not thinking of her, he saw her coming towards him in the Haymarket.

His pulses beat violently; he paused involuntarily for a second, and then went on again. She was on the same side of the road; unless she turned into a shop, she would be obliged to pass him. Would she stop? Would she speak? By the time he reached her he knew that the drain of blood from his head had left him pale.

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Whether that or some other cause influenced her, Deloraine not only stopped and spoke, but, for the first time since his marriage, put into her speech a personal note.

"I hardly knew you, Hilary," she said. "You have changed. Is it because you are not well, or are you unhappy?"

The gentle, solicitous tone, unexpected and reminiscent of other days, suddenly overwhelmed him. "I'm damned unhappy," he said.

"Oh, Hilary! And is Jean?" Poignant concern, acute regret, strung her voice.

"Yes; she's damned unhappy, too. Anyone who lives with me when I am unhappy," he added honestly, "is bound to be unhappy."

She looked at him sadly and a little sternly. "Hilary, you have deteriorated."

"Yes, I know. I married in a fit of animalism, and I've begun to pay the penalty, and I shall go on paying it for the rest of my life."

They were blocking the pavement; people were brushing and pressing by them.

"We can't stand here," said Deloraine. "Have you had lunch?"

"No," said Hilary.

"Let us go and have it together."

They went into a small, fashionable restaurant, harmoniously draped in rose-pink. A man sitting at a table near the door recognized Deloraine as they passed. His subdued remarks to a companion

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of his own sex were illuminative of the trend of popular speculation:

"Mrs. Randolph Wynne. That's young Thornton she has with her — the man who wrote 'Sex and Social Order.' Clever book. They say she did most of it. . . . I don't know: nobody knows. She has a husband living, and Thornton has just married, too — an uncommonly pretty girl, from her photographs. It's a mystery. I should say she was a woman who could get what she wanted; it's just a question of what she wants."

Deloraine chose a table a little apart. For some time they neither of them spoke. Hilary was making real to his mind and drilling his nerves to the wondrous solace of being near her once more — he and she alone. And he was wondering, with curious detached amazement, what species of man it could have been who had relinquished the companionship of this beautiful woman — beautiful with the essential and moving beauty of intellect and soul, and senses glowing vividly beneath the calm of her pale face — for the soft mould of regular features, for a pearly complexion and a rounded form? Deloraine could think with him, could appreciate with him, could feel with him. Jean could do none of the three. Deloraine could thrill him by her knowledge and by her cogent grasp of values. Jean's mind could be stirred by no question but a personal one. Deloraine had taught him the beauty of old monuments, and had made him hear the low cry of

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the unblessed and the suffering. Jean looked upon a church as a gloomy building which it was respectable to visit on Sundays, and did not recognise the fellowship of any class beneath her own. If he touched Deloraine's finger, and she relaxed the curb of her mind, the touch would shiver through every nerve of her body. Jean's slack cords could hardly be made to vibrate even in the tense fold of an intimate caress.

"What about the office?" asked Deloraine, when the little fishes and the garlic had been removed after a short and ineffectual appeal. "Are things going right there?"

"No; all wrong. Hoffman says my stuff is beginning to lack grip and I must get more magnetism into it. But I don't know how anyone is to write when his nerves have been racked by a paltry scrimmage about some man's rudeness or some woman's airs. She has a temper like a little cat. Of course, I rouse it. I get on her nerves as badly as she gets on mine."

There was an excellent opportunity here for Deloraine to say that she had told him so, but she did not say it. "Is it always so?" she asked acutely. "Is there never any content, any affection, between you at any time?"

"How can there be? We haven't an idea, a sympathy, a feeling in common. At every single point we jar. Except — well — you understand — if you can call that content and affection."

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"It *should* be — supremely."

"Yes, it should be. But we are not exactly guided by the perpetual lamp of the evening star."

"What do you mean? Jean is not sensual."

"Not in the least. But she has to do what I tell her, hasn't she? It says so in the Prayer-Book."

"Oh, Hilary, Hilary!"

"Yes, I know; I'm casting my self-respect in slabs."

"But why do it? At least that is in your own control."

"Why does a man who has staked his last cent and lost turn to drink? Why does a man whose nerves are humming like a sheaf of wires in the wind turn to drugs? It's an opiate — the one way of smothering thoughts, of hiding for a time the silly tragedy. *It's absolutely our only common ground.* We resort to it more and more. Jean was backward at first, but now she sees that it's our only chance, and works up a kind of artificial emotion. How can we discard the one condition where we are fond of one another? — oh, gorgeously fond!"

Deloraine put down her fork; the fish choked her. But she did not speak.

"Thank Heaven," said Hilary, when he had emptied his plate in untasting silence, "there's no prospect of children! That's the only piece of luck I've ever had in my life."

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"Hilary!" The word was uttered deeply, poignantly; tears stood in her eyes.

"Well, no — that's not true — I've met you — I forgot."

"I did not mean that." She looked down at her plate and began moving the remnants. "I had a baby once," she said softly. "It died, poor darling! If you had had one, you could not speak like that."

The brilliant brain, the strenuous intellectual vitality and energy, had softened and merged in a great instinct. As he had sometimes done before, Hilary saw in her now just a mother, equal with the simplest of her sex, yearning, compassionate. It stirred all his most generous and his noblest impulses.

The mood passed from her, and she looked up at him with a return of the old feeling of responsibility. This could not go on. Here were two natures, neither inherently vicious, which were being swept by a conjunction into a vortex of iniquity. It seemed to her there was a stern inevitableness in the way Fate forced her to direct the course of this man. For a few months her hand had been off the tiller, and there had followed drift, folly, shoals, impending shipwreck.

While she had watched over him the star of his fortune had continued steadily ascending. Now, at least, it was stationary; very soon, if he continued along his present course, it might fall in one shock to the ground.

"Does Jean still love you?" she asked.

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"Love me! She loathes me — except, of course, when she's spuriously fond."

"It is not right for you to live together in such conditions."

"Right! I couldn't conceive any state of existence more frantically immoral. It's an alternation of hate and license. That point doesn't appeal to Jean; she thinks it's all right because we are married. She knows she is unhappy, but she has no idea she is sinning; and she won't believe it when I tell her."

A waiter came to change the plates. Hilary waited until he had gone. He twisted his glass on the table, examining the wine abstractedly.

Suddenly he looked up. "What am I to do?" he asked.

"There is only one thing to do."

"Oh, it will come to a split, of course. This sort of purgatory is impossible. Tell me" — he took his hand from the glass and bent over the table — "how must I provide for her? What is the forfeit, what is the fine, for making a blunder in life?"

CHAPTER XIV

THREE more months jolted and jarred through their course. Day followed day of tense monosyllabic calm; then came a torrential storm, then rumbling thunder, then tense calm again. Only stringent adherence to monosyllables could bar from perpetual prominence the fundamental opposition of every thought, feeling, perception, taste. Keen sensibility and tension was mated to conventional shallowness and superficiality. Even in the ordinary daily outlook it was impossible to find a single point of harmonious contact, of harmonious understanding. Hilary to Jean was exasperatingly obscure and hypersensitive; Jean to Hilary excruciatingly imperceptive. She had not even a sense of honour.

Upon this last point the pitiful series of wrangles and dissensions eventually culminated. A tradesman one week had delivered Jean an account surprisingly low, and her investigations had revealed a mistake in addition against himself. She had said nothing at the time, but a day or two later she came to Hilary, gloatingly joyous. The man had signed the receipt without noticing the slip, and she had ten shillings to play with.

"I shall buy that enamel and silver clasp I saw

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in Derry's yesterday. Such a lovely design! Well, it was twelve-eleven-three, but I can make up the rest."

Hilary ran his finger down the bill. "Yes, he has missed a 'one,'" he said. "But you can't keep it, Jean. We owe it just the same; we have had the goods."

"Can't keep it!"

An ominous flush came into her cheeks, an ominous light into her eyes. Hilary saw that it meant a fight — a fight even over the rudiments of honesty! If she had been pressed for money, and had deliberately stolen and come to him ashamed and repentant, it would have been much less bad. He could have felt for her, could have forgiven. But she did not understand that it was wrong, and he could not make her understand; and the hopeless vista of discord stretching from such an incapacity as that appalled him.

He went through the fight, but he told himself that it should be the last. She flashed, stormed, attitudinized, struck him, finally swept from the room, as she had done scores of times before, in a flood of fierce tears. He did not humiliate her by forcing her to take the money to the tradesman; he paid it himself, without even telling her. The time had gone by for driving home principles. The incompatibility had reached its permanent dividing point. He scarcely felt angry with her now; he was

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only heavy-hearted and concerned to bring the impossible conditions of their existence to a close speedily and quietly.

When he told her, she acquiesced quite calmly; she hated him too much to care. She could stay in the flat if she liked, he said, until the lease was out. But she did not like. Much of the furniture was hers; it could be stored for a time, and she would go abroad and enjoy herself. Afterwards she would return to London and begin life afresh as an untrammelled woman.

In May, a year and a month after it had been embarked upon, the experiment of Hilary and Jean's marriage came to an end.

Jean duly went abroad. Her predominant feeling was one of fluttering excitement at a novel experience, a novel realization of life. At the age of twenty-six she had reached a position which the majority of her sex never reach at all. She was *a free woman*. The thought swam through her veins like wine. Her allowance would enable her to live without discomfort, and she could find means of augmenting it; and she had her independence, her wedding-ring, and even a grievance. She could go where she liked, do what she chose, snap her fingers at everybody. No one could order her here or there; she was her own mistress, answerable to no one but herself. She could indulge the joy of flirtation to the extent of her bent, only checking it at the extreme limit of discretion — a condition

which proved to be no trouble to her, though her admirers often found it such. At first she feared that the full enjoyment of her new life might be disturbed by the remembrance of Hilary, by some remnant of affection for him and the recurring thought of his loneliness; but she found with relief, as the days and weeks and months passed, that this never deepened from sentiment into pain, and that it became more and more easy to disperse it at will.

Hilary succeeded in sub-letting the flat and in disposing, at a sacrifice, of his superfluous furniture to the incoming occupant. He found, too, that he could obtain a new tenancy of his old chambers in Westminster; and thither, in the course of a few weeks, he returned. All this involved considerable bargaining and trouble and delay; but when at last he stood in the familiar rooms, furnished precisely as they had been furnished before, it seemed to him that, after a violent and disintegrating interval, he had returned very much to his former position. The only differences were that he was charged with a quarterly payment to a firm of solicitors, and that he could not marry.

The payments he looked upon as tribute to the world in return for his experience. Many people had bought their experience in heavier coin than gold. It would be onerous at first, and he would have to stint himself to provide it; but it would be a lesser burden when the sub-editorship, getting daily closer, became his, and inconsiderable when

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he reached the goal of his journalistic, but by no means of his final, ambition and sat in the editorial chair. He looked forward to this event with thrilling anticipation. From that exalted throne, where no one could say him nay, he would thunder the opinions which his present editor blue-pencilled. Myopic human being as he was, he did not see that, when he should come eventually to occupy the seat of government, time and experience would have so instilled their softening influence that he himself would carefully excise the too hasty and fervent utterances of the impetuous spirits under him.

That he was debarred from marriage he counted no detriment. It was even an asset. He was separated no more effectually than he had previously been from the only woman with whom he could be happy. And the intellectual companionship, the active sympathy of mutual tastes and interests, which his marriage had interrupted, and whose value had been bitterly proved through loss, could now surely be resumed. Deloraine did not yet know of his separation from Jean. He dropped to sleep that night in the peaceful promise of the thought that she should know on the morrow.

The elements struck in tune with his spirit when the morrow came. Soft and clear, a June fragrance filled the air, even in London. Never since the evening when Deloraine's entrance, immediately after his declaration to Jean, had shown him what would be the cost of his surrender to emotion, had

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he felt so light-hearted as when he walked through the sunny streets on his way to Pont Street. The past year seemed to be rolling from him like a heavy cloud, and in the radiance beneath, smiling like the smiling sun, stood Deloraine.

Often during that year had his feet taken him along these same ways; but to-day he no longer hung in the distance, watching. With pulses beating a little quicker, but without hesitation, he walked down the street and up to her door, and pressed the bell. Still, the conditions of the old days were not quite reproduced. The good Invers, his friend by many a pleasant word and many a kindly coin, did not open the door. A new butler was in office. This man asked his name, and did not relax in his favour when he gave it. Evidently he had received no instructions. He showed him ceremoniously into the drawing-room and said that he would see if Mrs. Wynne were disengaged.

Hilary's spirits appreciably drooped. The room was the same; the familiar furniture was in its familiar places — the chairs where he had sat so often with easy content, the piano where he had rattled through silly songs with Jean — but he himself was not the same: he felt a stranger. Yet, he told himself, his disappointment was absurd. Deloraine knew nothing of the changed conditions; she had not had time to instruct her servants. One could not resume the old footing all in a moment. Ten minutes he waited in stately solitude; the butler did

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not return; everything was curiously quiet. Then there was a step outside, a slight rustle of skirts, a hand on the door. Yes, it was Deloraine.

She looked at him expectantly. This visit would not be tolerated, he saw, unless there was a good excuse for it.

"I am not breaking the implied promise," he said, before holding out his hand. "The split has come. We have parted definitely and finally. Jean has gone abroad and I have returned to my old rooms. . . . I thought you would like to know."

The last words were uttered emergently, almost apologetically, to meet her manner of receiving the information. He was not sure what he had expected — a light in her face, perhaps, a smile in her eyes, a quick offer of her hand.

Certainly nothing of the sort was forthcoming. Instead, she said quietly: "I think you have acted wisely. Such a life was not good for either of you."

Hilary felt woefully dejected; a douche of cold water could not have effected a more chilling reaction. Did she not understand that now — now things could be as they had previously been? Surely *her* mind had not become obtuse?

"You don't mind my coming to tell you?" he asked, with curious choking bewilderment.

"No; I should have felt hurt if you hadn't told me, Hilary," she answered, coming a step nearer him and speaking more spontaneously. "I think I

was entitled to know. I am sorry — very sorry — that it has all turned out so unhappily. It was a mistake. We all of us make our mistakes — I have made mine. But there are always recompenses. Marriage is not everything, and love is not everything.”

“Isn’t it?” This time he looked boldly, deeply into her eyes.

“No.” She returned his glance without flinching. “You have your work, and, if you stick to it, I think you have a career.”

He could not make an eyelid quiver. Had she lost every little bit of feeling? Did she no longer want him? Had it been a mad dream? Was it credible that he had ever kissed those lips? Had he ever held that stately form, flexible and abandoned, in his arms?

Then his heart leapt. She dropped her eyes — suddenly and consciously — and walked across the room.

She went to the window and looked out. “I’m glad to hear you have got to work on a new book,” she said, turning round again.

“Yes, I’ve done about half,” he answered; “I *think* I’ve done about half.”

She did not ask its subject, far less offer to read it with him. And how she had helped before! How generously she had given up her time! How she had submitted to talk for hours about the book and its prospects. It seemed to him suddenly that he was

a gluttonous, unthankful pig, perpetually opening his mouth for more. At this moment he was constraining her by his continued presence. What he had come to say had been said, and she had held out no invitation to him to enter into a general conversation; she had not even asked him to sit down. Yet he had seen, in that one tremor of her eyes, that he had not become indifferent to her.

"You will let me know when it comes out?" she said.

Comprehending, with a dull sense of fall and of loss, too new yet to be poignant, that the interview was at an end, he held out his hand, and she gave him hers. In the touch — in the thrill that shivered through him, as he knew that it shivered through her — he realized how impossible had been his hope. He saw the inexorable logic of her attitude. He could not expect her to allow him to come glibly back to the old familiar ways after so dismal a fiasco — so pitiable a proof of its impracticability. Only two courses lay open to him: the path that contained everything and the path that contained nothing. There could be no middle way. A *rapprochement* could not be half a *rapprochement*.

He gathered some of her spirit to his aid.

"Yes," he answered, "I'll let you know. I shall get on more quickly now."

"More quickly now." . . . "More quickly now." . . . His own words echoed — dully, monotonously — in his ears as he tramped along the street from her closed door.

CHAPTER XV

HILARY's one stable point of contact with Deloraine was now Pearl Carbis. Quarterly he continued to visit her, as the almoner of her unknown benefactor. For five years Pearl had accepted these payments as the utmost recognition of an aggrieved and alienated mother, without suspecting their real origin; and the longer they went on the less were they likely to provoke suspicion, for they had now become habitual and involved neither inquiry nor explanation. From year to year, however, and from quarter to quarter, Hilary had noticed the slow but unceasing advance of another cause which might bring the fiction to an end. Every time he saw her she seemed a little frailer, a little more spiritless; every time her cheek-bones were a little sharper, her movements a little heavier. Once or twice when he had gone he had found her in bed. She seemed to like his visits; they brought her into contact with a world with which she had somehow got out of touch; so he often sat with her for an hour or two, trying to get her to renew her interest in life. He had offered to take her to plays and restaurants, but she had invariably refused. Lately, as he had seen her health so indubitably failing, he had used his efforts to induce her to leave London and settle in a

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more bracing climate — at least, to obtain medical advice. But she had always deprecated, rather petulantly, the suggestion of treatment, maintaining that she was not ill.

He was not surprised, therefore, when one morning in December, six months after his last conversation with Deloraine, he received a note from a doctor, asking him to go and see her. The note was on his breakfast-table and he obeyed it at once. He had become attached to Pearl through their long series of meetings and deeply resentful of her history. He felt vaguely, too, some sort of companionship in adversity with her, for the man who had contributed to her misfortunes had also contributed to his own. They would both have been happier had Randolph Wynne not lived.

When he had climbed to her rooms in the house in Shepherd's Bush, he was met by a hospital nurse, with a grave face and a quiet tread. For a moment he feared that Pearl had already found refuge from the scorn of an unrelenting world. But she was still alive. A cold which she had caught a week before, the nurse said, had taken hold of her weakened constitution, and developed rapidly into pneumonia. There was no vitality and no heart in her to throw it off. She was failing from hour to hour and could take hardly any nourishment. The child had been sent into the country through the instrumentality of the doctor.

A few minutes later the doctor himself arrived.

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After visiting his patient, he came to see Hilary in the sitting-room.

"Yours was the only address she could give me," he said. "I fear the end is very close. If you know of any friends, they should be summoned at once."

Hilary telegraphed to Carbis and to Mrs. Swete-Evans, and sent an express message to Deloraine. He went to the office afterwards, and returned to Shepherd's Bush late in the afternoon. Deloraine was there. She came out of Pearl's room a few minutes after he arrived.

"She just knows me," she said. "Poor thing, she thinks I have something to forgive her. I think she is happier to know that I have not."

"She wouldn't doubt if she knew about the annuity," said Hilary. He felt jealous, more now than ever, as the possible moments dwindled, that her generosity should remain unrecognized.

"She must not know that," said Deloraine. "It is all the kindness that she has to attribute to her mother, and her last thoughts of her shall not be embittered by the knowledge that even that is not true."

"Mrs. Swete-Evans may come herself. I telegraphed to her and to Carbis."

"If she does, the act will soften the disillusion about the annuity."

About six o'clock she again went into Pearl's room. An hour later she came out, in response to

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a low knock on the door. Hilary was standing on the landing.

"Carbis is here," he said.

The tall priest issued from the sitting-room — a strong, quiet figure in the dim light. A little more worn, a little deeper and more impressive — that was all the change in him in five years.

"She is very ill," said Deloraine. "I am not sure that she will know you."

She took him into the sick-room. It was a small square room, prettily furnished. Two shaded candles were burning on the mantelpiece. Carbis noticed, with a tense grip at his heart — affecting him in the first moment more acutely even than the bed and its occupant — a small crib standing in the corner. A nurse was sitting near the candles, watching, waiting; that was all there was to do.

"Will you leave us together, nurse?" Carbis said to her.

She rose and went quietly out of the room with Deloraine.

Pearl was lying partly on her right side — her beautiful hair loose, her racked, wasted face almost as white as the pillows. Her eyes were closed. One thin hand lay upon the coverlet. It still bore the wedding-ring which he had placed upon it.

He knelt by the bedside and took the hand into the warm clasp of his assuringly enveloping palm.

"Pearl," he said softly . . . "Pearl."

There was no answer. But the hand had warmth

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in it; she was breathing. He did not move, and after a time she slowly opened her eyes and looked at him.

"Oh, Mark!" she said, quite naturally.

"You know me?"—with a quick note of gladness.

"Oh, yes." She spoke wearily and weakly, but with an inflection of wonderment at an unnecessary question.

Then some fleeting thought seemed to pass through her. "Why have you come? You must not hold my hand. There is a reason—I can't remember."

"I have come," he said gently, "because I want our long estrangement to cease—because we have need of one another."

"You had something to forgive." Her mind was still troubling after a recollection.

He looked at her deeply. "Poor suffering, wandering sheep! poor ill-treated, buffeted Pearl! I have forgiven you long ago. But mine is feeble human forgiveness. I am your husband, and I have never taken my love from you. Will you turn to me, can you turn to me, even now, in your spirit?"

Pearl made no answer for several minutes. Her lids fell heavily over her eyes. Carbis feared, in tense suspense, that she might not speak again. And then, as though complaining at a needless call, she again slowly lifted the lids.

"It is too late," she said.

"No," he said earnestly. "Time is beginning for us. If we must separate here, it is only a separation of the frailties. Let us ratify our union and obtain for ourselves and for our mistakes the forgiveness that can avail."

"How?" Her dying faculties showed a flicker of interest.

He bent a very little closer. "Put away from you for ever all the grievous past. Turn to me once more as a wife. Let me kiss you as a husband."

Her weary brain struggled in the chase of half-remembered things, her eyes vaguely fearful. "What is it that I can't remember? What is it?"

Then suddenly a shiver swept through her — a terrible spasm of pain and repulsion. She made a gesture as if to keep him off, to hide the sight of him.

"No!" Her voice was charged with pitiful, helpless pleading. Then, very quickly and sharply, her frame shaking, her hands clutching the bed-clothes, with all the remaining strength she had in her she cried, "Oh, no, no, no!"

With a choked cry in his heart that was hardly kept from his lips, Carbis covered his eyes to hide the look in hers. He saw that all his pleading, all the power of his exerted will, must be in vain. He could not win her back. Here was a strange, inscrutable force, which, after six years of change and of knowledge, of growth and hardship and bitter pain, in the shadow of illness and of approaching

death, was arrayed against him as strongly and inexorably as at first. Stricken by a will which he could not understand or explain, but which he none the less extolled, he prayed by the bedside of his wife with a concentration of earnestness which carried him outside the four walls, outside the clay-bound environment of suffering humanity, into the clearer realms which his faith externalized.

Pearl did not speak again. A silver clock on a chest of drawers ticked an hour away. Carbis never moved from his knees.

Then, in the silence of the little room, the curtain unrolled and ran down on Pearl's troubled, tragic life.

CHAPTER XVI

ONLY Carbis, Deloraine, and Hilary were at the funeral. Mrs. Swete-Evans had not come. Inexorable to the end, the hard old woman had remained in her Yorkshire fastness.

A thin sprinkle of snow lay on the frost-bitten ground, and a few light flakes fell on the three mourners as they stood by the open grave. The officiating clergyman, his crumpled surplice fluttering slightly in the cold wind, looked without interest on the little group, repeated the words of the Burial Service in a voice which had become mechanical, and turned away with no loss of time to the next funeral.

Deloraine and Hilary parted with Carbis at the cemetery gates. As they watched him walk down the long road, a solitary straight figure in black, both — in their hearts — were praying that this might end the crushing sequence of misfortunes which those broad shoulders had been called upon to bear.

They themselves were going to the Surrey village where Pearl's child had been sent, to bring her away. Deloraine meant to take charge of her for a time at least, leaving her eventual fortune to be decided by circumstances. It seemed to her that it would be better that Hilary should accompany her on this er-

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rand, for the child knew him well, through his frequent visits to the Shepherd's Bush flat, and would find confidence in the sight of a familiar face. She was very anxious that she should know as little of, and suffer as little from, the shadows that had fallen over her young life as could be managed.

During the drive to Waterloo and the train-journey from there they spoke very little. A common grief had brought them together quite naturally; they accepted one another's presence without constraint. During the last few days they had met frequently, but their talk had been always on the subject of their mutual concern, never of themselves. That impersonal attitude continued to-day as they faced one another in the railway-carriage on the way out of London. The few remarks they exchanged referred either to the bleak final scene they had just witnessed or to the child they were going to fetch and its future.

On the return journey, however, with the little girl seated between them, a new feeling began to possess Hilary. It seemed to him that he had somehow failed to realize, to appreciate, the liberty of Deloraine's companionship which had lately been his. He had accepted it as an ordinary occurrence — quite natural, quite to be counted on — and now it was almost over. This hour's journey in the train, a short cab-drive, and then — emptiness, blank void!

For the moment he was sitting within three feet

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of her, talking calmly; in an hour they would part, and part utterly; for Pearl's death, though it had brought them together for these days, had removed the last link between them. After they had separated at the door of his chambers, he did not know when he should see or hold any communication with her again.

His muscles were tense and his brow damp with the stress of the realization of this. He had an insensate desire to stop the train, to hold it back. He grudged every turn of the wheels and hated the rhythmic sound of them. It seemed to him that he did not demand to touch her, to talk to her even, but merely to see her, to be near her, to watch her talking to the child, just as he was doing now. He wished simply to perpetuate existing conditions, to stay the hand of time. It was the sense of impending loss — absolute loss — that gripped him and choked him.

Deloraine's manner with the child was exquisite; and Hilary, in spite of his personal stress, delighted in watching her. It was necessary that this little thing should become used and attached to her new protector before she began to ask questions about her mother, and that her outlook should be kept happy. So Deloraine refrained from a tone of compassionate tenderness, but set herself to win her affections, talking brightly, playfully; descending with wonderful facility to the plane of the child's mind; drawing her to confidences, and then com-

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plaining that her "whispers tickled." And she was happy herself — that was the most exquisite and wonderful thing of all — happy and at home on the child's plane, this woman whose exceptional intellect had won her a European reputation.

Her small charge was a pretty, winning little creature, dressed in a big white coat, with brass buttons, and a large hat. With a child's intuitive perception of whole-hearted sympathy, she quickly made friends with Deloraine. She annexed her entire attention with as little compunction as if she had been a nursemaid. By the time they reached London she had begun to treat her as someone she had known always, looking up from time to time confidently and affectionately. Happy child, thought Hilary, making all undesignedly, but so effectually, so good a friend! Happy child, indeed, who would always have access to her present companion, see her continuously through her life!

The train drew slowly into the long platform at Waterloo and came to a standstill. The hour's railway journey was over, and nothing had been said, nothing had changed; the hand of time had moved inexorably on. The parting was now a matter only of minutes. They were to drive to Hilary's chambers and drop him there, and then Deloraine would go on with the child to her house.

Could it end thus? His logic gave him no reason to the contrary, but his mind recoiled with desperate incredulity before the utter blankness beyond.

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Deloraine seemed absorbed by the child. "We will have a hansom," she said to him. "It is not far, and this little maid won't take much room; she can sit between us."

He wondered if she felt a tithe that he felt. Again and again she had deceived him by her repressed emotion, by her outer cold calm. But now she seemed genuinely engrossed by the new interest that had come into her life.

She put her arm round her charge in the cab and held her close. "Isn't she a dear little thing?" she said over the big hat. "I am sure I shall keep her always."

Then, for the first time, she inquired about the progress of his book. Hilary told her almost breathlessly, with a feeling of being pursued by the chasing minutes. They were crossing Westminster Bridge. Here was a personal note; here, at last, was an echo of past talks, of things as they used to be; and only three streets remained to him. But she did not follow the subject into detail. Resolutely, it seemed to him, she declined to be drawn into the old literary intimacy.

"Work hard," was all she said. "They are beginning to believe in you."

London was no new thing to the small person between them. It spelt monotony to her. She was rather sorry she had come back and said so quite plainly.

"London is not a very happy place for little peo-

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ple," said Deloraine, partly to Hilary and partly to the child. "It's too busy and crowded. I am going to West Drewton for Christmas. There's a big garden there and very few houses. We must have a Christmas-tree and games and toys and crackers."

She yearned suddenly for the joy of bringing into this mite's life all the pleasant things she had the power to give her.

The small face glowed. "Oh!" she gasped. Then suddenly: "Is Christmas near?"

"Yes; only two weeks off."

"And will it be a party?"

"Yes, dear."

"Who will come?"

"Oh, you and I. And we must find some other children."

But this young lady was already fond of masculine folk. They were people who had pockets with nice things in them. And Hilary had been kind to her, not only to-day, but on his many visits to the Shepherd's Bush rooms, when he had brought her sweets and toys.

"Not Mr. Thornton?" she asked, with more than a shade of disappointment.

Deloraine coloured perceptibly, and Hilary bit his lip. He tried to lead her thoughts into other channels by a gentle, evasive answer.

But the small voice was not to be quelled. "Won't Mr. Thornton be there?" she persisted,

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this time wonderingly. She could not disconnect her two protectors.

Something had to be said.

"Where shall you spend Christmas, Hilary?"

"In London, I think." His tone suggested indecision between following that course and accepting one of many invitations to join country house-parties.

"Shall you dine in your rooms?"

"I can go to the club." Constraint had raised its head. "I think Christmas is rather overworked. I shall be glad when it's over."

The cab drew up before the large block of flats which contained his chambers. And now, at the last, he was almost glad; it was an escape from the difficult tension.

He smiled at the child and patted her. "Bye-bye, little girl. Keep a kiss for me when I see you next."

He got out. For a moment he held Deloraine's hand. Then he turned up the steps of the building. "When I see you next," he had said lightly to the child. But this was all — absolutely all! The fleeting *rapprochement* was over, and it could not come again.

Something in the appearance of his shoulders, in his slow tread, as he mounted the steps struck suddenly and poignantly on Deloraine's cords of compassion. Against other calls she had steeled herself, but this was an unexpected appeal which found her unarmoured. All the mother-love sprang up in her,

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obliterating everything. The cab was already moving. Hastily, almost frantically, she called to the driver to stop, and then whispered to the child.

Hilary came back quickly, but not eagerly. He expected a final word of encouragement, of counsel.

"Say what I told you," said Deloraine, as he looked into the hansom.

"Will you come to West Drewton?" said the little girl.

CHAPTER XVII

DELORAINE and Hilary sat by the fire. They were in the long, low library which had been the scene of his first interview with her. Behind him was the small table where his bowler-hat had rested with such concern to his soul. At his side was the large desk, again covered with papers, where Deloraine had been working when he entered. The lamps were lighted and the house was silent.

This evening a spirit of pensiveness, if not of melancholy, rested upon them. An untoward thing had happened during the day. In the morning Pearl's little girl, when out walking with her nurse, had accidentally met her grandmother. The old lady, curious at seeing a well-dressed child and a uniformed nurse whom she did not know, had stopped and spoken to her, had made inquiries of the nurse, had discovered or deduced the truth. And the stern heart which would not turn to the daughter had turned to the daughter's child.

Since Pearl's flight there had been, if not an estrangement, an abatement of cordiality between the Hall and the Manor; but this afternoon a carriage with the Swete-Evans' bearings on its panels had swept into Deloraine's drive, and the unbending fig-

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ure of the reigning dowager had stepped from it. She wanted the child. There was a disposition to strange gentleness in her manner, however. Recognising, perhaps, the larger moral title of the little orphan's present guardian, she had not demanded her in the old overriding spirit: she had asked for her even humbly. Deloraine could not resist the claim of a grandmother. Sorrowfully she had relinquished her charge, and Mrs. Swete-Evans had carried her away in her landau.

So they were pensive this evening — Hilary and Deloraine. Neither was reading or working. They were simply sitting looking into the fire.

"Dear little girl! I'm glad she had her Christmas-tree," said Deloraine, breaking into one of the wide spaces of silence. "But I think her grandmother will be kind and human to her. I never saw her so softened."

Hilary said nothing. After another quiet interval, Deloraine broke out almost with passion:

"Why should I miss her so much? Why should I want her so much? I have my work — more work than I can do, and more interests than I can attend to. She would have been a care, an interruption. But I wish the old lady hadn't seen her — I wish she hadn't."

Hilary bent a little towards her. There was something compassionate, even protective, in the movement.

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"I wish she hadn't, too," he said. "You would have cared for her very faithfully, Rainey. I think Fortune has treated you rather shabbily."

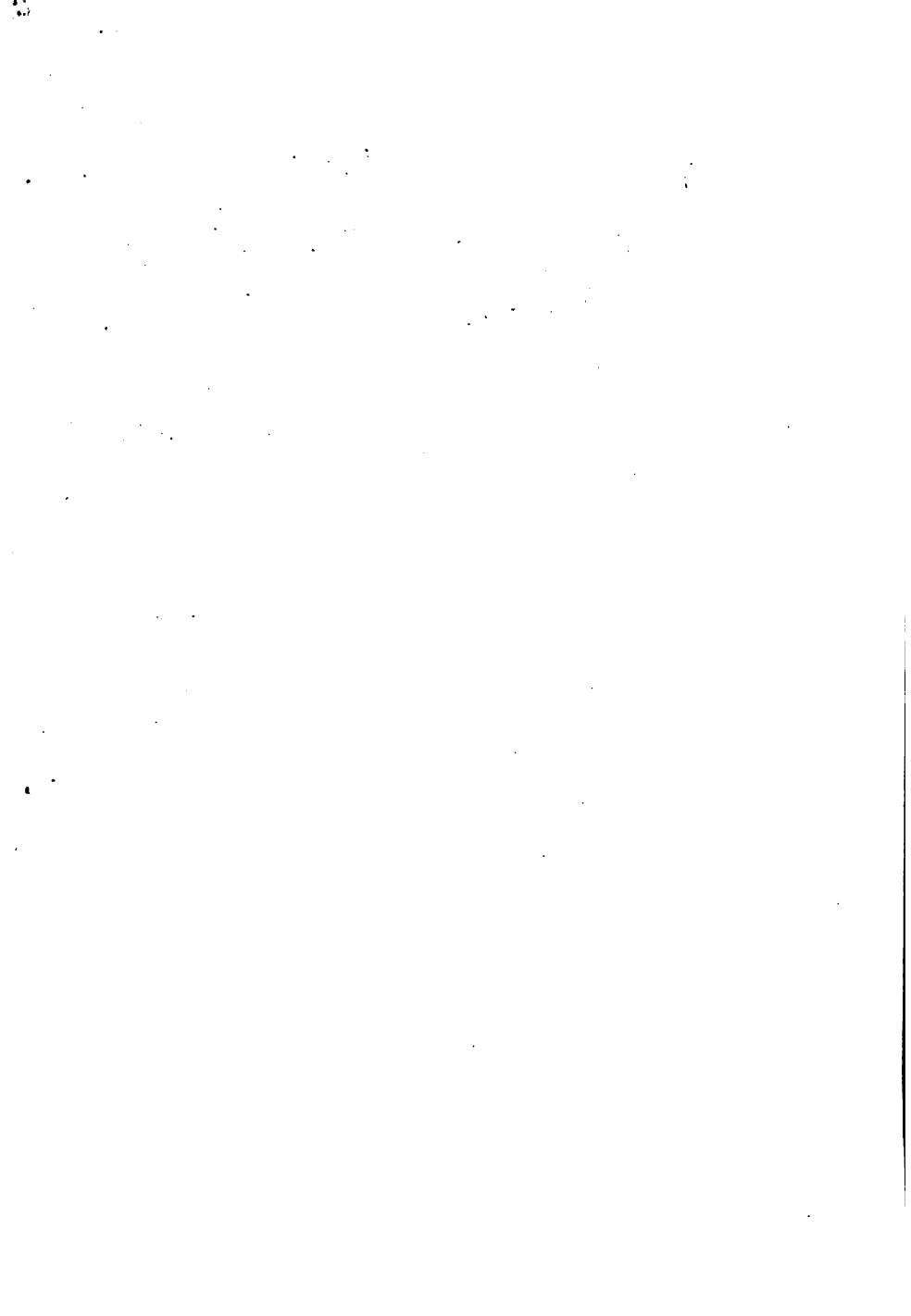
Once more there was a long silence. Deloraine was still looking into the fire. Ten minutes passed before she spoke again; then a new note had got into her voice, very tender, reminiscent, yearning.

"She only lived a few months. What a short little life! And I wanted her so much."

"A few months!" Hilary turned his head slowly and looked at her. "A few *months?*"

But Deloraine did not answer.

THE END



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